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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 578. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 27TH, 1900. [ONE PENNY.

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Short Stories

No. 578.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending January 27th, 1900.

The King and the Picture.

The king wanted a picture; not that he had not many fine paintings in his miles of galleries, paintings ancient and paintings modern, paintings allegorical, paintings historical, paintings sacred, paintings profane, paintings patriotic, paintings poetic, paintings of people, and paintings of things, paintings of peasants and paintings of kings. But this was to be a very special picture; it must represent the honour of the country by depicting her in the act of winning one of her most famous battles, it must pay a tribute to her army and to her generals by representing the enemy in the very moment of defeat and the conquerors in the grandeur of a glorious victory, thus appealing to and inspiring the patriotism of all future generations.

And, above all, it must represent the King himself—his honour and his courage. His must be the central figure, he must be shewn as leading those gallant legions to victory, his must be the individuality which should impress itself on all beholders.

But who should paint this masterpiece? It must be done by skilled hands—very skilful, for although many of the leading officers, and men, too, for that matter, might sit for their portraits, this could not apply to the enemy, and then the whole scene must be drawn from description, and the right position must be accorded to the author and designer of it all so that the right impression should not fail to be given.

Courtiers, artists, military experts, critics, favourites, were all consulted. All had their pet painter, all had their own theories about the picture, all hoped to gain

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something out of the transaction, and a most overpowering and perplexing list of candidates was submitted to the Royal choice.

At last a selection was made, M. Blanc, a celebrated painter of historic scenes being the favoured artist. Then followed the question of price, and this was necessarily large, for, apart from the market value of the painter's own skill, much expense must be incurred. Journeys to the battlefield for scenery, models, interviews with celebrated men who figured in the war so as to secure their accounts and their likenesses—all these things would cost money, so finally the price was agreed at the respectable figure of 20,000 francs (£800).

The painter set to work with alacrity and earnestness. He was to produce a masterpiece, and one which from its position should be constantly before the eyes of Europe. He felt that his country's honour was to some extent intrusted to his keeping, while he had to contend with the personal jealousy of many, who, just as the actors in a piece all want the best parts, each desired to have a position of the greatest honour and dignity.

Patiently and conscientiously M. Blanc executed his task, hours both early and late were spent in the studio, and the time of so-called recreation was generally passed in the company of those who by their brilliant descriptions and spirited anecdotes seemed to bring the whole scene before his very eyes with vivid portraiture.

The huge canvas began to teem with life and to grow into unity. Friends and acquaintances, admirers and even opponents sang its praises, it would be the picture of the year—the age—the century—M. Blanc would never need to paint again except for pleasure

But meanwhile all was not smooth in the life of the honoured artist. Royalty knows nothing of time or engagements, and the king kept pressing for the delivery of the picture at the earliest possible moment: so under pressure poor M. Blanc worked early and late, spent money almost recklessly on journeys and on models, and had to allow two unwelcome guests to take up their permanent abode in his house, their names being sleeplessness and care.

Only too soon health began to fail, and ways and means became matters of increasing difficulty. But then the honour of painting a picture for the King! and then the 20,000 francs for which the word of the King stood pledged.

"Courage," he would say, "it will only be for a little longer, and then my work, my great work will be done. Then a grateful King will pay me the price, and a grateful country will do me just honour."

At last the finishing touches were given, courtiers, generals, nobles, even the King himself visited the *atelier*, all were charmed, delighted, enraptured. Even rival artists, in their Bohemian generosity, confessed ungrudgingly that the work was a great one, and that Blanc had proved himself worthy to paint the picture for the King.

And Blanc himself—now that the work was done, he could scarcely bring himself to part with it: it had been his life for many a long month, his whole being had gone out into it, his whole self was in every part: it seemed as if all he had hitherto done was absorbed into this one great work, it had exhausted him. But now for the remedy: true the *atelier* would be empty, but then the walls of the world-renowned picture gallery would hold his treasure: true his purse was exhausted, but then the King would soon replenish that: true his eye was dimmed, his appetite impaired and his sleep fitful, but was he not "*le grand* Blanc," who had painted the picture for the King?

Even rival artists, in their Bohemian generosity, confessed ungrudgingly that the work was a great one.

The great event is over. The great picture complete in every detail, gorgeously framed, as became a scene of so great importance and such great characters, has been conveyed to the palace with the utmost care, and placed in the position of honour. Blanc is a great man, every journal contains notices of his masterpiece, but he himself feels as though he had lost a child, and notwithstanding all the congratulations which pour upon him, he is oppressed with a sort of presentiment of impending evil.

He is seated in his now empty studio feeling the reaction after the strain from which he has really suffered, which he had scarcely realized when the bell of his *appartement* announces a visitor. The visitor is the King's Equerry.

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"Good-morning, M. Blanc. You are, I regret to see, not looking as well as your friends could wish."

"Well, my general, you see I have had little time to attend to my health, or to think of anything but the King's order for some time."

"Aha, we are all like that in his service. When he orders there must be no rest, eh?"

"Certainly, I found it so. But tell me, my general, does his majesty really like the picture?"

"Without doubt he does. I do not think he has any that pleases him so much; in fact he is almost tedious in the way he talks about it, and will have everyone admire it."

"So much the better for me, but I hope he does something more than admire it."

"Ah, you sly rogue, I suppose you mean has he paid for it? Well, that is the business which has brought me here this morning."

"And I am truly thankful to hear it, for I am absolutely what our English neighbours call stoney broke."

"Ah, well, we can soon mend that. Here, count these notes, and sign this receipt, for I have to attend a review in half-an-hour."

With almost feverish haste the artist took the notes and counted them; something seemed wrong, again and again he went through them with the same result. At last he said: "My General, is this what the King sent me?"

"Certainly," replied the Equerry. "do you think me capable of being dishonourable in such a delicate matter?"

"By no means, but here is the fact: the King agreed with me for twenty thousand francs, and you have brought me sixteen thousand."

"Twenty thousand francs! Blanc, you must be mad to think of such a sum."

"Very far from it. I neither would nor could have painted the picture for a sou less. It has cost me what I shall never regain, and what money cannot buy, but still the 20,000 francs is the price, as many persons know, and those 20,000 francs I intend to have."

"Softly, my friend. This language may cost you very dear; you are implying that somebody has cheated you, either the King or myself: if the former, you know he has rather an unpleasant way of dealing with persons who offend him, and if the latter, I am at your service when and where you please."

"I accuse no one," said Blanc, "and I will only ask you to give me your word of honour that this is the sum actually sent by the King."

"On the faith of a general it is," said the Equerry. "Now be a sensible fellow and sign my receipt, which you see says, 'Received of General Richeton the price of the picture.' Why, man, the few francs about which you make such a fuss are only the King's margin."

It seemed that there was no more to be said, so Blanc, with many a protest, signed the receipt, by which he stated that he had received the price of the picture, and wished his visitor good-morning.

"Softly, my friend, this language may cost you very dear."

After he was left alone he again thought very carefully over the whole incident and at last resolved for the satisfaction of his own mind and the honour of the King to lay the whole matter privately before the King himself, and as he had the right of entrance to the palace, and remembered that the General had told him he was going to the review, he thought no time like the present, and without further delay than was needful to change his dress he set forth, and arriving at the private entrance he asked if he might see the King.

The answer was in the affirmative, and in a few moments he was admitted to the King's cabinet, and received in a very courteous manner.

"Well, M. Blanc, are you come to get an order for another picture?"

"No, your majesty, but I am come to ask whether the one I have had the honour to execute still gives pleasure."

"Certainly it does, how can you doubt it? Have not I told you so a hundred times? Why, you artists are so sensitive that you require constant praise."

"No, your majesty, I do not want praise, but I had a very special reason for the liberty I have taken in repeating the question."

"Oh, never mind, I am quite satisfied; but, M. Blanc, there is one thing which does not satisfy me, that is the price, it is terrible."

"Your majesty astonishes me."

"I find it terrible, I assure you, I never seem to be able to get money; in fact I have had to deny myself most unpleasantly in order to pay you this money."

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"But the margin is very great, your majesty."

"The margin! What does the man mean?"

"I mean, your majesty, that there is a great difference between 20,000 francs and 16,000 francs."

"And what in the world has that got to do with me?"

"Because 16,000 francs is the exact sum which I have this morning had the honour to receive from your majesty as payment for the picture which I was ordered to paint for 20,000."

"Is this true?" said the King, turning a shade more livid than his wont.

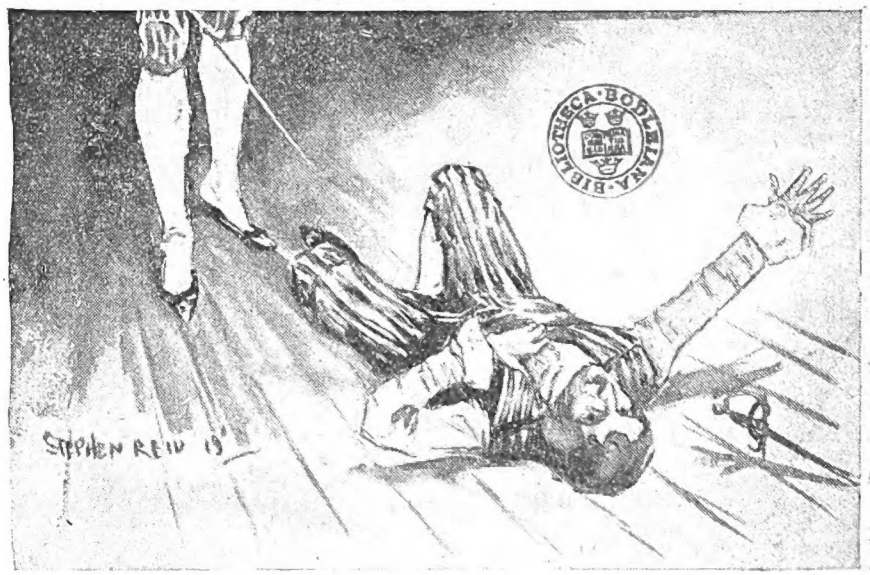
"Perfectly true, your majesty. These identical notes were put into my hands scarcely an hour ago by your majesty's chief Equerry, and I was distinctly told that I must expect no more."

"But how did he account for the difference?"

"Your majesty, he called it 'the King's margin.'"

"The accursed scoundrel," said the King, "this is not the first act of the kind, by many, of which I suspect him, but alas, what can I do? Oh! Blanc, any position is preferable to that of a king, and I only hope if the day comes that my country is in a strait it may not prove that the men whom she now trusts have treated her as they have treated me. Now leave me to think over this business."

* * *



M. Blanc sank heavily to the ground, and, murmuring "Ah, my picture!" expired.

It was evening verging into night. A grand assembly filled the salons of one of the most accomplished hostesses of the day. Wit and wisdom, beauty and rank, wealth and valour united to form a gathering that it would be difficult to surpass. Among the guests was the wearied and yet strikingly handsome figure of M. Blanc, while in another part of the salon might have been seen the flashing decorations and the gay uniform of the chief Equerry.

As the evening passed, it so happened that M. Blanc found himself engaged in conversation with his hostess within a very short distance of the Equerry. There occurred one of those sudden and inexplicable lulls which do sometimes hush a large assembly, and a single voice was heard asking the strange question:

"Madame, did you ever hear of the King's margin?"

"Certainly not, my friend," was the reply. "The King's margin! What do you mean?"

"Ah, madame, I too never heard of it until this morning, and then I was not pleased at discovering it. But it seems that the person who can give all information on the subject—better even than the King himself—is the chief Equerry."

By this time no little curiosity was aroused, all eyes except one pair, were turned on the painter, and he was questioned on every side and urged to explain himself. At length, with a very apparent struggle to master his feelings, he began the account of his picture, his toils, his hopes and his fears, and when all were on the tip-toe of expectation, he closed his story with a calm account of the episode of the morning. Many of the guests heard the whole statement, and when he had ceased there was an almost feverish haste to resume the buzz of general conversation,

Scarcely had the conversation again become general when M. Blanc felt a sharp touch on the shoulder, and, turning round, met the angry and cynical glance of the Chief Equerry.

"Sir," said he, "you are aware that this matter cannot end here."

"It shall end where and when you please, my General," replied Blanc. "I am ready to support my words even in the King's presence."

"You know well enough what I mean. Name your second."

M. Blanc at once named a well-known gentleman of the company, and in a few moments a grim party of five, for the host was present, assembled in a secluded part of the picture gallery. Swords were procured and carefully measured, the distance was marked, and the seconds placed their men.

But, alas, it was soon apparent that the painter was no match for the bully. A few passes only were exchanged, and then M. Blanc sank heavily to the ground, and, murmuring "Ah, my picture!" expired.

"Adieu, gentlemen," said the other. "Let us hear no more of the King's margin, if you are wise."

JOHN H. ROGERS.

[*The above story can be vouched for as being perfectly true. The names of the characters have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but otherwise the incidents related are in strict accordance with actual facts. It may be of interest to add that the equerry had what he euphemistically described as the "King's Margin," and it will be in accordance with the reader's sense of justice that a terrible expiation awaited him later.*]

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My Fiancé's Glass Eye.

He was tall, dark, and, to my taste, altogether charming.

Last evening, for the first time, we walked in the winding pathway of the park; the straight avenue which stretched itself under the windows of the house had been until now the only witness to our confidences; I loved dearly this avenue, with its great oak trees placed at a regular distance apart, the benches for talking quite at one's ease, the green grass all around and beyond. When one wandered off a bit, the huge window panes, which seemed, by the light of the setting sun, great wide open eyes, all smiled at our happiness.

"Walk along the avenue with Monsieur de Valente, Angèle," my mother had said to me at the beginning of our engagement. "The pathways of the park are altogether too damp."

And I walked along the broad avenue, gently resisting Raoul (he was named Raoul), who appeared to have, I do not know why, a marked preference for the covered walks.

"Mamma says the narrow pathways with the overhanging shrubs are damp. Had we not better remain here?"

That evening, however, my head was turned, and something tugged at my heart-strings—he was to leave the next day to hunt up some papers necessary for our marriage.

Eight days without seeing him! How could I live! And he, taking advantage of my trouble, made me turn into the damp alley, which, by-the-way, in spite of its bad reputation, seemed to me as dry as possible.

"My Angèle, you are not going to forget me during these eight days?"

"Forget you! Ah!"

I would have lifted my hands to take Heaven as a witness that such a thing could never happen, if he had not held them tightly clasped in his own. It is not my habit to lose myself in sentimental protestations, my vivacity forbids it, and this time not more than at others did I play my nature false.

"Raoul, you love me, do you not? Well, then, I wish to tell you all my faults. I shall be more tranquil if you know them beforehand. You would see them sooner or later; so listen! I am very wilful. I will not yield to you; you may as well make up your mind to it. Then, I am quick as gunpowder. I stamp my foot, I scream, I even cry at times. Happily, all this passes quickly. Besides that, I am a coquette, like all women. You will not be jealous, I hope. And then, what else? I can't quite tell—a little gourmand at times, not wicked, not deceitful—I find nothing else. So much then for the moral side. As to the physical, what can I have wrong there? You must know that also. Ah! One of my finger-nails is not quite the same as the others; look! but it seems to me that isn't too ugly."

And, releasing my hand, I showed him a little pink nail, a little squarer than the others, a very innocent eccentricity of Nature. Raoul laughed, and wanted to kiss it, but I drew away my hand.

"I have also lost a wisdom-tooth, which is lost for ever, alas, so I can never be altogether wise. They took it out because it came too soon. Now, sir, it is your turn. Confess yourself."

Raoul, visibly embarrassed, remained silent.

"Go on. Have a bit of courage. You may be quite easy. I shall not scold. I do not know your faults, but it is quite certain you have some. In the first place, you are near-sighted, for you wear a monocle instead of an eye-glass, with which, it seems to me, you would see much better. Mamma says that glass causes you to make such fearful faces; but I don't think so. You please me as you are. However, take out the glass, so that I can see how you look when your face isn't crooked."

I had seized, with a little gentle pressure, the string of the monocle, when Raoul stopped my hand.

"No, my little Angèle, leave it there. Without it, I should no longer see you. I am near-sighted, very near-sighted, it is true; and I want to see you, Angèle, for you are the joy of my eyes."

Then, before even I had time to think, he had taken me, drawn me to him, and covered my eyes and my hair with kisses.

"Raoul, how naughty of you! enough of that—if you please."

"Why naughty? Are you not my *fiancée*, my darling little wife?"

"When I am your wife it will be quite different; let me go. I will not remain here, it is too dark under these trees."

I had succeeded in releasing myself and holding down my hair, which, under those soft kisses, was flying in all directions, as if charged with electricity. I escaped by running to the avenue. There was no longer any question of making Raoul confess; blushing violently, I was thinking of quite different matters.

The next day he was gone. What a frightful moment this departure when, standing on the front steps, I had turned away my head so as not to see Jean gather up the reins, the horses pull together, the victoria sway; in a word, so as not to see they were taking him away from me.

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Papa had gone with him to the station, while mamma and I breakfasted alone together. It was dismal in the extreme.

Mamma ate as usual, which I couldn't understand; as for myself, I ate only a very little, just enough to sustain me, and even that with difficulty. Every mouthful stuck in my throat.

In the midst of breakfast Justine opened the door.

"Madame, Monsieur de Valente has left his glass eye in his room. Shall it be sent to him?"

Had the heavens been opened to let fall on the table the sun and the moon, I couldn't have felt a greater shock. The end of the world will, perhaps, be nothing to equal it. I repeated with horror:

"His glass eye, Justine?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; it is on the washstand."

Mamma grew pale, but remained calm.

"Very well, Justine, you may leave the room. We will see if it is necessary to send it to him."

I had only two alternatives, either to faint away or to burst into convulsive sobs. I chose the latter.

"Mamma—mamma, he has a glass eye! Good Heavens, is it possible? How horrible! I shall never console myself! I shall die of grief!"

"Calm yourself, my child, calm yourself. It is ridiculous to put yourself in such a state. This gentleman has deceived us, that is all. I always thought he had rather a queer expression."

Mamma had risen, and I was sobbing on her breast.

"Why did he not tell me? I who avowed all my own defects—the nail, the wisdom-tooth, and the anger—all—everything! Dear me! how unhappy I am! And only last evening he had said: 'You are the joy of my eyes.' He should have said: 'You are the joy of my eye.' Ah, it is dreadful!"

"Come, quiet down; don't cry like that. I tell you it is ridiculous. Think no more about it, try to calm yourself. How unfortunate it is things have gone so far! Only eight days before the wedding, and everything ready! Well, it is a good thing we found it out in time."

I hardly listened. One question burned in my throat.

"He has another eye to change with, mamma, and this one, which he has used, is probably put in water to cool."

Mamma was horribly worried. "I knew nothing whatever about it," she said. "I have never known anyone intimately who had a glass eye, and do not care to know how they manage."

She continued a little monologue all to herself: "It *is* pleasant. All this trousseau, marked with a V. We never will find the same initial again; and your father will listen to no one else. He was charmed with this gentleman at first sight. The references were perfect; the Jesuit fathers, his colonel, and everyone. That is so like a man; one can never count on them. A pretty discovery, indeed! I always thought there was something extraordinary about him; the individual never pleased me, and I was quite right."

I had raised my head; the vision of the glass eye gazing at me from the depths of the wash-basin still troubled me profoundly. But another vision came also to my memory.

I saw again my *fiancé*, so good, so tender. I heard once again all our prospects for the future; all our plans made together; and, suddenly, it seemed to me to be last evening, and a rain of kisses was falling on my hair. I had not told mamma about these kisses; but I felt I loved Raoul with his one eye, and that nothing would induce me to give him up. All my courage came back to me.

"Mamma, I am sure he lost that eye in some honourable, magnificent way! It is a wound of which he should be proud; in saving someone, perhaps, from a fire; in sacrificing himself, it is certain—he is so good, he has such noble sentiments. I quite understand he would dislike confessing it."

"What do you say? Are you quite crazy? Do you think I am going to allow you to marry this man with such an infirmity? You, beautiful as you are, and only seventeen, and with your fortune, too? No, a thousand times no, my child; do not forge yourself a romance of devotion and sacrifice, it is perfectly useless. I will never consent to your marriage with a man with one eye. Should he lose the other, he would be quite blind, and how agreeable that would be!"

"But, mamma, I will be his faithful dog; I will lead him, I will take care of him, and will love him, in spite of his infirmity, in spite of everything which interferes to separate us!"

I was in an extraordinary state of exaltation. My sobs began again, harder than ever and did not promise to stop, when Justine re-entered the room, her honest face showing every expression of astonishment and stupefaction.

"It isn't possible that mademoiselle can put herself in such a state because M. de Valente has forgotten his eye; at all events he can buy another if he needs it before this evening, and he won't throw himself in the river because he hasn't that thing in his face."

And Justine showed me, hanging delicately at the end of her fingers, Raoul's monocle that I knew so well, with its round glass encircled with tortoiseshell, which seemed to me for the moment like a luminous halo. My emotion forbade my speaking. Mamma, however, went quickly towards Justine.

"Is that what you call a glass eye, Justine?"

"Certainly, madame; it seems to me that's the name for it. In any case it doesn't suit Monsieur Raoul, and mademoiselle would do well to give him spectacles when they are married; it is strange that men of the present day think it pretty to look with one eye—like that; it must be very difficult to keep it in place. I should never know how"—and Justine, with a comical grimace, stretching her mouth and turning up her nose, tried to introduce the monocle underneath her right eyebrow. I could contain myself no longer. My tears and sobs turned to idiotic laughter—I was so content! So happy!

It is now twenty-five years since all that happened.

Raoul has been an excellent husband—quite as unendurable as that order of individual always is. He has worn spectacles now for a long time, and when he wishes to see anything, looks with his two eyes. The monocle is buried in a drawer. I keep it as a relic of tears and laughter, and shall will it to my grandchildren if I should have any. My daughters are engaged and I have already told them that the pathways of the park are cold and damp in the evening! Each one has his turn in this world—life passes and very soon there will be nothing of our household but my *fiancé's* glass eye.

D. T. V.

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"A Tide in the Affairs."

Now that Philip Mannell is dead—in body only, for many generations will gratefully remember the name of one whose writings roused an enthusiasm which will be lasting—I will give the world a chapter of his life hitherto unwritten.

Like most men with or without an intellect above the average, being twenty-five or twenty-six, he was consumed with the firm conviction that he could make if not a mark in, yet a living out of letters, if only—and that "if only" sticks to most men—the necessary opportunity would come.

How many times have you and I in our spring days drawn up the skeleton of a plot, possible or impossible, to be torn up the next minute?

If possible, second thoughts made it too commonplace; if impossible, sufficient courage was lacking to trust it to the coldly cynical eye of an editor.

Mannell had the same wish—the same firm conviction, but the plots would not come.

Being without predilection for any particular practical calling, and being a person of rather more than average abilities and less than average foresight, he had become a schoolmaster.

For a year or two he had pursued his calling in London and was fast settling down into a feeling that, though he might be a success in his profession, the muse of literature would never condescend to befriend him, in spite of the strong feeling that he had missed his vocation.

He had rooms in Acton, and, of a nature loving solitude, lived, and took his recreations alone.

One evening he left his rooms in an aimless sort of manner, intending, as he often did, to enjoy a smoke either walking, or, if particularly lazy, on the useful 'bus.

He sauntered along, his thoughts busied with nothing in particular; then hailing a 'bus, which at this time of the evening, going citywards, was almost without occupant, he climbed to the top, refilled and relit his pipe, looked out his necessary change, and prepared—to do nothing. He had no direct intention, but let the 'bus take him where it would. The steady jog-trot and the clanking chains of the horses, with the fact that, the shops being closed for the most part, the way was not well lit, combined to bring a drowsy feeling over him.

Now and then the 'bus pulled up, and the "Benk, Benk" of the conductor, though not very energetic, would rouse him.

Half-way between Queen's Road and the Marble Arch, the 'bus again stopped.

Mannell was partly roused, though beyond noticing two men had hailed the driver he did not bestir himself.

"Only one on top. That's better than those two women inside."

Though this was said in an undertone, Mannell heard it. They came upstairs and sat down, with some little hesitation. Mannell was in a middle seat, and so the two men could not sit far from him. Dulled as his attention was, he felt that they regretted the presence of another.

This was interesting, but he little dreamt what he was in for.

The 'bus started again.

Carefully avoiding attracting their attention, Mannell took stock of his companions.

One man—evidently the elder—in a long overcoat and large soft felt hat, with his bushy eyebrows and heavy military moustache, had a distinct Slav appearance.

His comrade was a beardless youth, with sharp aquiline features and keen eyes.

After a low conversation of some minutes, Mannell's attention, which had flagged, was again called to them, by the younger exclaiming in a louder tone:

"It's not my fault. There were no cabs about. We had to come up here. We may as well remain, for he can't hear."

"Speak French, you fool," growled the other. "I expect he won't understand that. I'll make sure."

By this time, Mannell was outwardly asleep, and inwardly keenly alive. He felt thankful that he was a fairly good French linguist.

The elder man leant over and speaking in French said:

"Pardon me, sir, how far should I book for Charing Cross Road?"

Mannell looked up.

"I am sorry, sir. I don't understand. I am English."

"Nevare mind, sare. Please ze route to Sharing Cross Road to tell me."

Mannell told him and with voluble thanks the man resumed his seat.

After the conductor had taken his dues, their conversation began again—this time in French.

"What time does he expect us?" said the younger.

"Any time this evening!"

"Have you settled details? Are you reckoning that he will be landed here in London?"

"No! No! that would never do. Nowhere near London. The East Coast though, I expect."

"When shall we know?"

"Strazy says in the *Telegraph* the day after to-morrow."

"Why not to-night?"

"He won't know till to-morrow, and in the meantime he will arrange the other details with us. You and I will have to see it through, I expect. By the way, the government seems uneasy about the vessel as it is. I hope they won't delay much longer."

The 'bus stopped at the top of Shaftesbury Avenue, and the two got off and walked away in a southerly direction. Mannell assuring himself that they did not

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see him, followed at some little distance. He, however, was destined to lose them, though he noticed, as he expected, they did not make for Charing Cross Road, but turning off, made towards Wardour Street, and were soon lost in the intricacies of Soho. Mannell, after wandering about for some little time, made his way back to Oxford Street and home. He felt if he could spot that communication in the *Telegraph*, that he was on the track of something startling, though for the moment he could see no way of following it up.

* * * * *

Two days afterwards, on Friday, there appeared in the agony column of the *Telegraph* the following:

Apckmp, qyr, lglc, nk—qrpyxw.

This was the only notice that Mannell could connect with the incident on the 'bus, and for a long time being unprepared for cipher, he could think of nothing to help him.

After many essays, it suddenly struck him that the last word was probably a signature, and then he remembered "Strazy" was to be the informant.

Following this up he found the letters were two earlier than the actual and thus he made out:—

Cremor, Sat, nine p.m.—Strazy.

This was very plain and straightforward, and though now and then he was afraid he was finding a mare's nest or was interfering in some private business, the matter had some fascination for him. If it fizzled out, he at any rate had had a little excitement out of it.

Cremor is, we know, a comparatively small place on the East coast; and to this place, Saturday being a free day for him, Mannell went for the week end.

It was in the train going to his destination that Mannell came to the conclusion that the business he was engaged in was no unimportant one. Turning over the leaves of his daily paper, his attention was caught by a paragraph stating that the French Government and people were exercised at the delay of a vessel, which was bringing home for a re-trial, a man whose condemnation and transportation had caused a European sensation and who was believed by very many to be the victim of an appalling series of machinations on the part of those in authority.

The vessel had been due some days, and had been sighted two days before in the Channel.

Secrecy had to be exercised because of the ferment of public opinion, and therefore nothing more was known.

Here then was the discovery he was on the eve of.

It was too late for advice, in fact he was rather unwilling to seek it, for fear after all of a fiasco.

The day passed all too slowly for the latter, who, excited as he was, could find no interest in the popular seaside resort, and scarcely knew how to pass the time after making the few arrangements he thought necessary.

* * * * *

On the deck of a yacht of some 150 tons, steaming up the North Sea and keeping just out of sight of the coast stood three or four men. One was gazing apparently eagerly over the water. The others were evidently engaged in watching the first. The latter, some few days before, had been transferred to his present vessel from a French cruiser, and he was expecting to be landed somewhere on the French coast.

Suddenly a man in the bows evidently in command, having scanned the coastline which had just appeared through his glass for some minutes exclaimed:

"Here is our destination at last."

These words acted as a signal and almost before they were finished, the three men had closed round the fourth, and in a few moments, he was gagged, bound, and thrust into a long chest not much larger than a coffin, but with ventilation for breathing purposes. As a further precaution a dose of chloroform was administered to the victim in order to keep him silent till he was safely landed and concealed.

* * * * *

When the two men whom Mannell had overheard on the 'bus, after sighting the yacht, sauntered down to the beach and ordered a boat, they might have been suspicious at the alacrity with which it was ready and manned; and they would have been still more averse to the little excursion if they had known that at least one fisherman was new to the calling, being a schoolmaster by profession, and that all were secretly armed, more prepared for boarding a pirate than for fetching ashore some luggage from the yacht which has scarcely had time to drop anchor.

The luggage consisted almost solely of a long chest of heavy weight.

Mannell's uncertainty about the whole business, led him to devote all his energies to securing the chest, and he neglected the vessel almost completely. He realised his mistake later.

The conspirators were too much engaged with the apparent success of the undertaking to scent failure now.

As the boat grounded Mannell jumped ashore first.

When the chest was landed, the elder of the conspirators speaking fairly good English, asked for help to carry the chest to a spot above the beach where a trap was to be ready to take it—to be examined if necessary.

Then Mannell stepped forward.

"One minute, please. We will examine it here."

Whether the question was so unexpected, or whether the air of the fishermen was threatening the two men at once turned and ran but they were quickly secured and detained while Mannell opened the chest and discovered its gagged occupant, more dead than alive.

As Mannell had guessed, the occupant of the chest was none other than the man who was the centre of Europe's interest.

Communication was made with London and the victim and his captors were sent to France, and thanks to judicious expenditure of hush money the matter never became public property.

It was surmised that Strazy, a name which concealed the identity of a high-placed French official wished to secure the man, and to force him to sign a statement that he was guilty of the crime with which he was charged or of some other equally serious offence.

Mannell received a suitable acknowledgement from the two governments, for the part he had played in the affair, but his greatest gain was more lasting.

His first and perhaps his greatest work was founded on the incident, and thus he laid the foundation of a fame which, though he is dead, is still undimmed.

S. B.

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How I Played Providence to Richard Stanley.

"How I came to be staying at Fairleigh Court at the time of the exposure of Lionel Vernon, its owner, doesn't matter," said Fred Massey. "There I was, and there I remained a spectator, if not an actor, in one of the strangest dramas that ever was enacted. You remember Dick Stanley, don't you?" he asked us, barely waiting for the unanimous refrain of "Rather" before he continued, "As nice a fellow as one could wish to meet. Shall I spin you the yarn?" with a sudden access of difference extremely amusing.

"You'll explode if we stop you," laughed Fairfax, "we all know your weakness, Massey, so fire away."

And nothing loth Massey obeyed.

"A charming host, a perfectly ordered establishment, the companionship of my favourite chum, what could be the matter with me that, try as I would, I was not able to shake off the feeling of depression that hung over me from the hour I arrived at Fairleigh Court?

"I felt positively nervous as the prospect of an introduction to Dick's *fiancée*, the beautiful Esmé Vernon, and when I tried to congratulate dear old Dick himself on his approaching marriage I found myself faltering out the merest common-places and platitudes.

"However, I put it down to brain fag and trusted that after a while my normal health and spirits would reassert themselves.

"I did not meet Miss Vernon at dinner, 'a headache,' her brother Lionel explained, prevented her joining us, much I regret to say to my satisfaction. In the course of the evening Dick announced he had some letters he was bound to get off. Our host was summoned to a consultation with the farm-bailiff and, perforce, I was left to my own devices.

"'Have a look at the pictures in the north gallery, old chap,' said Dick, 'there are one or two well worth your attention. Besides,' and he flushed a little, 'I want your opinion on Esmè's portrait. It was painted some years ago now—in fact, when she was but seventeen. She was always lovely,' he added, musing, 'but even I hardly realised what a beautiful woman my darling would have grown.

"'Tis a long time for a woman to wait—seven years—isn't it, Fred? And yet my dear girl has waited just so long for me. More, she had not even the consolation of letters, for correspondence between us was forbidden. I was anything but prosperous, as you know, when I left England, and Lionel declined to sanction our engagement. I don't blame him, though between ourselves I think he's a bit hard. But now Fortune's turned. I 'struck 'ile,'" as the Yankees say, out in California, or rather stumbled on a gold mine, and so there is nothing between me and happiness which,' he added with a bright smile, 'being interpreted signifies Esmé.'

"Fairleigh Court was by no means an ancestral mansion. It was a large commodious modern house, well-built, artistically decorated and filled with all the newest improvements.

"Lionel Vernon was by way of being an artist, and the north gallery was fitted up very much in the fashion of a studio. There were, as Dick had said, several pictures well worth one's attention, but although I was tempted to linger over an exquisite face after Romney, curiosity induced me to look for Miss Vernon's portrait. Instinctively I made my way towards a large oil-painting, at the extreme end of the gallery. It represented a young and exquisitely lovely girl of about seventeen. Lovely it was in very truth but mournful beyond expression. In the large wide eyes—of dark-brown, there lay a shadow. The perfect lips formed for laughter drooped in sad curves. It was a face to haunt one, a face—I started. Of whom did it remind me? Memory conjured up a fleeting vision of a tall slight form, a wealth of golden hair, eyes brimful of happiness. How like, and yet how cruelly unlike the face before me; and then the recollection faded, and I was no nearer discovering who it was that Esmé Vernon's portrait so curiously recalled to me.

"Somehow the sadness of the pictured face affected me. I found myself pitying the girl, feeling that life had some sad fate in store for her. I remember even as the thought flashed through my mind how indignantly I dismissed it. What more could any girl want from fate than a husband like Dick Stanley? How Dick would stare if he knew the length to which imagination had carried me.

"I laughed at the idea and turned to leave the gallery, my hand was on the door, when a strange sound broke the silence. I turned, my blood tingling and a queer sensation at my heart. Once again it echoed through the gallery, and I shivered as I listened. Ay, shivered, for it was the echo of a mad woman's laugh. I glanced round apprehensively. Nobody was to be seen. After a while I was ready to persuade myself that my wretched nerves had played a trick, and that I had heard nothing more dreadful than the wind rustling among the poplars. I shut the door again, and walked boldly up the gallery. All was unchanged, no sign or trace of anything or anybody. I remained sceptical until I reached Miss Vernon's portrait, The face looked sadder than ever and I felt strangely stirred as I gazed.

"Suddenly I saw the drapery upon the gallery wall move, and a small white hand drew back a heavy *portière*. Fascinated, I watched a pale, thin face look out at me—watched till the face was burnt into my brain. The shadow lurking in the eyes of the pictured beauty had become a dread reality. The original of Esmé Vernon's portrait stood before me, madness written in her every line and movement.

"Even as I looked, the figure, with a weird unnatural laugh, vanished, and search as I might no trace of her remained.

"The shock which the awful vision gave me, left me deep in meditation from which I was aroused by Dick himself.

"'Why, old chap,' he said, 'have you fallen asleep or what? I've spoken to you three times already. Here's Esmé come to see my best and dearest friend. Why, Fred——'

"Shaking off his hand I gazed in utter stupefaction

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at the girl beside him. Tall, fair—I glanced from her back again to the portrait. Ah, no, there was no shadow in her eyes, no hint of a fate too sad, to pitiful to think of. But who, who could she be?

"And then, by one of those strange freaks of fancy, brain waves—call them what you will—the studio faded, and I seemed to stand in an old-fashioned garden. A tall grey-haired man hastened to welcome me and by his side a fair young girl.

"'It's Mavis,' I cried, 'Mavis Grey.'

"Stanley gazed at me in astonishment.

"'What does he mean, Dick?' cried his *fiancée*. 'How dare he so insult me?'

"The words recalled me to the present position of affairs.

"'Your resemblance to the daughter of an old friend for the moment quite startled me, Miss Vernon,' I explained. 'I can never apologise sufficiently for my clumsiness in speaking so abruptly.'

"She listened to my explanation, and appeared quite satisfied, and Dick took no further notice of the incident, but for the rest of the evening I was conscious that Lionel Vernon was regarding me in a catlike fashion from under his eyelids.

"'I hope you'll sleep well,' said he as I wished him good-night. 'Only don't let your exuberant imagination get the better of your common sense, else you'll be seeing or hearing something else peculiar!'

"'Hardly,' I returned. 'I expect you keep your chamber of horrors locked at night.'

"For a second his eyes dropped, then staring me full in the face he laughed:

"'You mean the gallery?' he asked. 'Hardly a compliment to my sister or her portrait.'

"The man was beyond me. I could no more fathom him than I could explain what had occurred that afternoon. His sister Esmé was undoubtedly insane. What motive could he have in concealing her and substituting another woman in her stead? For that the woman who had been introduced to me as Dick's *fiancée* was Mavis Grey I was convinced.

"A mystery there undoubtedly was; how could I solve it?

"And by one of those strange turns of fortune chance put the clue into my hands.

"I was too much agitated by the strange events of the day to feel able to compose myself for sleep. I paced the room with nervous energy forming first this and then that conclusion. At last nature reasserted itself. I found myself yawning, I grew drowsy, and finally threw myself dressed as I was upon the bed.

"I woke that night with a start to find my hands icy cold and my heart beating at express speed. Something had startled me, but before I had time for conjecture I heard a sound as of a woman weeping. In an instant I remembered that my room was on the same floor as the North Gallery and as quickly I decided that the sounds issued from there. Intensely excited, but with my nerves well in hand I groped my way as quietly as possible down the dim corridor until I stood a few feet from the entrance to the picture gallery.

Fascinated, I watched a pale, thin face look out at me.

"I glanced into the room, and at the sight which met my eyes I had difficulty in repressing an exclamation of horror.

"Lionel Vernon was bending over Dick's *fiancée*, who with every appearance of terror and dismay, was striving to shake off his restraining hand.

"'You to defy me, to say what you will, and what you will not do! Another word, and I will crush you utterly, destroy for ever the love you boast of. Do you suppose Dick Stanley will continue to love you when he knows the truth?'

"'The truth!' she echoed scornfully. 'Tis you, not I, who should fear that. I have but to tell my tale to Dick, and he will love, will pity and forgive!'

"Lionel smiled in that smooth, evil sort of fashion that I had always hated.

"'What have I to fear?' she went on passionately. 'The fault, if any, will be laid to your charge. You told me that Dick Stanley was engaged years back to your sister Esmé, and after years of weary waiting at last he returned to England a wealthy man. You told me that if he had learnt the girl he loved was dead, he would go mad or die of grief.'

"'Yes,' said the man quietly, 'and then?'

"'You begged me for his sake, the sake of the man your dear dead sister had adored, to personate her. You said I was her living image, and that no one could detect I was not she.'

"'And then?'

"'I did so, and—and, Dick never knew. But now,' and her voice took a note of exultation, 'now Dick loves me for myself, not for the sake of that other woman, and when I tell him all, he will but love me the more. It isn't possible,' she went on, 'that I could marry him with such a lie upon my lips. Besides why should you wish it? Even if I consented, it would be no good; sooner or later I should be discovered. You see that man this afternoon remembered me. Others also know

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me as Mavis Grey. I cannot marry him with such a lie upon my lips,' she cried once more.

"'It will be that or nothing,' said Lionel savagely.

"'You mistake,' she answered eagerly, 'he will surely forgive, because he loves me so.'

"'You are leaving me out of the question, I fancy,' interrupted the man. 'Your tale sounds pretty and interesting, I grant you. As to whether it will bear inspection or not, that is another matter. If you remember, you first met Stanley at my house in Bayswater; he entered the room, where you were alone, greeted you as the woman he loved—and you replied as that woman.'

"'Well?'

"'Not well at all,' he answered with a mocking little laugh, 'listen to my version of the affair and you will agree with me. First I met you at the house of an artist to whom you sat, as afterwards you did to me.'

"'What if I did?' she broke out fiercely. 'I was poor and glad to earn my living—no matter how, so long as it was honest.'

"The other shrugged his shoulders and continued:

"'As a model you came to me, and in the course of conversation you learnt the history of my dead sister's engagement to Dick Stanley. You also remarked on your extraordinary likeness to her. One day Dick Stanley returns; taking advantage of my absence you throw yourself into his arms, and he, mistaking you for Esmé, is only too glad. I am horrified at the deception you have practised, but partly out of sorrow for Dick, partly out of the weakness a man always shows when a pretty woman is in question, I did not unmask you. But at last my conscience would not let me countenance the fraud. Say,' he added, with a scornful laugh, 'shall I give your lover my version?'

"'He cannot believe what you say,' she panted.

"Vernon broke into a peal of mocking laughter.

"'What, believe your word, the word of an adventuress, against mine. Try, and see what the result will be.'

"She moaned, clasping her hands like one distraught.

"'What shall I do? What shall I do?' she cried.

"'Be sensible, hold your tongue. Marry him and say nothing.'

"'But——'

"'I have my reasons for wishing it,' he said, with that soft slow smile of his. 'What they are do not concern you. You will have a home, a loving husband, wealth and happiness.'

"'At the cost of truth, of honour. Oh, what will it all profit me when the price I must pay—is my soul.'

"'Folly,' he sneered, 'you are nervous and excited. A good night's rest is what you want, my dear. Things will appear very different in the morning.'

"But she could only answer with her sobs, until out of patience the man took her arm and led her from the gallery—passing, greatly to my comfort, through the other door.

"In the library next morning I noticed a small packet of papers on Mr. Vernon's writing-table, and the idea suggesting itself that amongst them I might find something connected with the strange conspiracy, I felt no compunction in going through them. At present the motive for Vernon's conduct was lacking, and it must be, I reasoned, a strong motive to induce him to embark on so perilous an undertaking.

"He greeted you as the woman he loved."

"My expectations were fulfilled. Among the papers was a deed by which Stanley settled £30,000 on Esmé Vernon, his future wife, with power to will it as she chose.

"The whole vile plot stood revealed. In a flash I understood the villain's purpose. He intended Mavis Grey to impersonate his sister Esmé right up to the hour of the wedding. But at the ceremony the poor mad girl herself was to appear. After—well, no one could see the fragile figure and believe she would live longer than a year. And in the event of her death Lionel would doubtless take care that he should profit.

"As I stood, the paper in my hand, someone grasped me by the arm.

"'Good Heaven, Dick,' I cried.

"'What are you doing,' said my friend sternly, pointing to the papers. 'What does this mean?'

"But I could only stammer, 'Dick,' I began, 'Dick—'

"'DICK.'

"A low voice echoed the name, the heavy curtains at the window parted and a tall slight form advanced.

"I recognised her as the real Esmé Vernon, the

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"With outstretched hands she came towards us."

woman I had seen the previous afternoon; with outstretched hands she came towards us.

"'Don't you know me,' she said in a hoarse, strained voice. 'Don't you know me?'

"'My God,' said Dick,; 'what does it mean?'

"For a moment he stood speechless, unable to move or stir, until a piercing scream roused him, as it were, to life.

"All unperceived, Mavis Grey had entered, and at the sight of the woman whom she so closely resembled, whose eyes were hers, whose mouth seemed to wear the self-same smile—at the sight, I say, she staggered, tottered, and fell.

"And the tall, slight figure in black came closer to where Dick stood, helpless and aghast.

"'Darling,' said a voice—her voice—and I noticed how exquisitely sweet and tender were her tones, 'darling, I'm glad you've come at last because I'm very tired.'

"Something, I know not what, made Stanley, dazed and bewildered as he was, respond to the appeal. He gathered the slight figure in his arms, and kissed the lips that clung so loving to his. A look of infinite happiness stole over her features, and then——

"'Fred,' said he hoarsely, 'come, look here.'

"And with a great fear at my heart I looked.

"Esmé lay dead in Dick's arms.

* * *

"For his sister's sake, Stanley let Vernon go unharmed, but the man's villainy was even greater than we suspected. From various sources we gathered that the poor dead girl, never very strong, had been subjected to a course of persecution by her brother, who was desirous of marrying her to an old reprobate whose sins were as numerous as his income was large.

"Finding threats and persuations were useless he, hoping to secure her adherence to his schemes by these means, had told her that Stanley had married another woman, with the result that the girl's nervous organization broke down completely, and she became a victim to melancholia. The disease made frightful inroads upon her constitution, and her heart was much affected, while her mental condition became such that marriage was out of the question.

"Vernon, desperate for money, had conceived the idea of making Mavis Grey impersonate his sister on Dick's return home, meaning as I have said to produce the real Esmé at the wedding. Once married he had little fear of Dick's disputing the settlement—mad or not mad she would be his wife. And in a short time Esmé would die, and he, Lionel, would, as her legatee, be in possession of £30,000.

"The sound of her lover's voice had for a moment recalled the poor girl's reason, and I like to think that—if only for a moment—she tasted happiness before she died.

"And Mavis?

"Well, as I say, I always thought her more sinned against than sinning, and by her suffering she fully expiated her deceit. For a long time she lay between life and death, and when at last she recovered, it was to find her lover broken in health and spirits, a wreck of his old self.

"But time cured their wounds as it cures most others, and the year after Esmé's death they married, and I can truly say are happy."

JOHN K. PROTHERO.

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AN UNANSWERED PRAYER.

It was a wild, stormy night, but the Rev. John Benham —rector of the Devon fishing village of Upmouth—gave little heed to it, as he sat in his study preparing his sermon for the following Sunday. He was over fifty, and looked it, by reason of his grey hair and stooping shoulders, but his features were fine and clear-cut, and his expression gentle and sympathetic, coupled with the far-away look of the deep thinker and profound scholar.

There was a knock at the door, and in answer to his "come in," his wife entered the room. She was a young and beautiful woman, whom the rector had married only two years before, and though he lived somewhat in the clouds, his love for his wife was very real.

He adored her as a precious gift sent to be the comfort and the delight of his old age. Truly, he knew little of her past life—only what she had told him —but that little was enough for his simple and unsuspicious nature. He trusted her implicitly.

Though only twenty-six when he first knew her, she was already a widow. Her husband had ill-treated her, and then deserted her, leaving her utterly destitute, and his death had caused her no grief. With her rich colouring, sunny hair, and lovely blue eyes, she made a bright picture in the dull, almost gloomy study.

"Oh! John," she exclaimed, seating herself unceremoniously on the arm of the rector's chair, "isn't it a dreadful night? James has just come back from the village, and he says there is great excitement down there, as there is a large ship going to wreck just off the rocks, right in sight of the people. The fishermen are doing all that they can with the boats, and James says they hope to save them all. I sent him back with some brandy, as it might prove useful."

"That's right, my darling, always so thoughtful," the rector replied fondly. "How dreadful these storms are, I hope no lives will be lost. Do you think I had better go down to the beach?"

"No, dear," she replied almost smilingly. "What good could you do? You know our brave fishermen will do all that can be done, and I told James to tell them to bring any injured person here. Was I right?"

"Quite right, dear, it is the least we can do, except pray."

"Oh! John, how wonderfully good you are!" she exclaimed, stroking his grey hair caressingly, "I verily believe you are the best man living. It is difficult to conceive there are so many bad men in this world, with you so good."

She meant what she said. To her he seemed something of a visionary and idealist, but always the best man in the world, and her love for him knew no limit.

"It is force of contrast," she assured herself. "If I am not bad myself—and I am not at all sure about that —I have known so much badness in my chequered life, and he is so good."

His wife's praise was sweet to him, but the rector was too modest to accept it without mild remonstrance.

"My dear, I am not good, not half so good as I ought to be," he protested gently, "and you know you may be good, too, if you wish, if you will."

She took his head in both her hands, and gazed deep down into his eyes.

"Dear, dear John, how I love you!" she said, in a tender whisper. "You are good enough for both. I am quite content to stand in the light of your reflected glory. But I must go, I hear a noise in the hall," and with a loving glance, she sped away.

The rector sighed. How beautiful and charming she was! Every day his love for her grew; but she was not entirely one with him. They were not yet one in thought and spirit. The great truths which were of such vital importance to him, were mere names to her. But he did not despair, he would go on hoping, and praying, and fervent prayer was always answered, he firmly believed.

In the hall Mrs. Benham found the servants gathered round a prostrate figure which two stalwart fisherman had just brought in.

"You told us to bring 'em here, mum," said one, pulling his forelock to the rector's wife, "and as he seems the only one much hurt, we brought 'im; he be dying, I think."

"Oh! poor man, I am so sorry, what can we do for him," she replied, bending over the injured man, and then the pallor of death came over her face, and a great horror shone in her eyes, as she uttered a slight exclamation.

The man opened his eyes, and for one brief moment gazed full at her, then wearily closed them again, feebly muttering to himself.

"I fear he is very badly injured," Mrs, Benham said, rising to her feet, and looking around with a strange expression.

"Mary, see that he is taken to the spare bedroom, and send for Dr. Jones at once. I will go and acquaint your master."

"She be that tender-hearted, she be," whispered one rough fisherman to the other, "did you see how white she went when she looked at him?"

"Ay, she be as good as she is luv'ly," the other returned cordially.

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The rector was startled when he saw his wife.

"Nellie, you have allowed this to upset you," he said, when he had heard the story of the unfortunate man.

"It has been too much for you, sit here in my chair, while I go and have a look at him."

Dr. Jones had examined his unknown patient, and had done all that was possible, but he shook his head gravely as the rector entered.

"I am afraid your services are more needed here than mine," he observed. "I don't think he will live, he is injured internally, as well as a broken leg. He looks a decent fellow, but I fancy has roughed it a good deal."

The rector's grey eyes were full of deep compassion, as he leaned over the man.

"My friend, can you hear? Is there anything you would like to say?" he asked in the gentlest tone. The man regarded him steadily for a moment and then said in a weak but eager voice:

"My wife! where is she? I saw her here, bring her to me."

"Poor fellow, so you have a wife," the rector replied feelingly. "But I think his mind is wandering," he added in an aside to the doctor, who answered with decision:

"Undoubtedly. You must be very quiet for a while," he continued turning to the sufferer. "We will talk about your wife later on," and he drew the rector from the room, adding: "He may live a day or two, perhaps longer; he is a man of splendid physique."

Mrs. Benham awaited her husband's return with feverish anxiety, pacing the study in an agony of fear and apprehension. But one look at his face was enough; as yet, he knew nothing.

"Oh! how long you have been," she cried, going close up to him, and speaking rapidly. "What did he say? Did he speak? Is he better?"

How truly kind and sympathetic she was! Anxiety for this stranger had quite excited her.

"Jones says he has little hope of his recovery, but that he may live for some days. He is slightly delirious, and talked of his wife; he saw her here, he says."

"Oh!" she gasped, clasping her hands together tightly, "what a strange idea. It must have been one of the servants he imagined to be his wife. I must go now and speak to cook. You must stay here and try and finish your sermon, you have been interrupted enough for one night."

But she did not seek the cook. She went swiftly and silently up the stairs to the room where the injured man lay, and locking the door behind her, stood staring down at him, as if unable to speak.

"Nellie," the man muttered, raising himself, "I knew you would come. I knew you were here; but how did you get here?"

"How did *you* get here?" she replied, in a low tone of suppressed excitement. "You who left me five years ago, you who died in South Africa? Explain quickly."

"It was all a mistake," he answered, turning his eyes away from her as he spoke. "I had a dreadful fever, and was unconscious for some time, and they thought I was dead, and wrote and told you so, and when I recovered I did not write and contradict it, as perhaps I should have done; but I was going to London to seek for you—a rich man, Nellie, but all my wealth has gone down in that accursed ship, and here I am in a strange house, without a penny. We'll have to begin all over again—you and I—when I get better. I swear I'll never be unkind to you again, as I was in the past. I must have been mad then, as I always loved you, and love you now."

"Hush!" she exclaimed, holding up her hand with an imperious gesture. "Don't speak of love, such men as you don't know the meaning of the word. I wished never to see you again. I would that you had gone down in that ill-fated vessel, for I am the wife of the clergyman you saw just now, and I love him with all my heart as I never loved you."

The man stared at her in surprise too great for words, and then stammered out:

"But what—how did it come about? I left you in London."

"Yes, to starve. Fortunately I had friends who got me a situation here, as a companion-housekeeper, and the rector of the parish married me, that is all."

"What a dreadful thing!" he replied. "I have a prior right to you though, you'll have to come with me, so you had better do it quietly, without any fuss. It's a clear case of bigamy, you know, what would your holy parson say to that?"

"Don't!" she cried fiercely, "don't refer to him in any way. You are not worthy to touch even the hem of his coat, such men as you and he are as far apart as the poles, you could never understand him. But he must never know, he loves me, and the disgrace would kill him. I shall never go with you," she added triumphantly. "You will never leave here until you are taken away, the doctor says. You will die, die before this week is out."

The man's face grew whiter than it had been before, and he stared at her in a dazed manner, as if trying to take in the meaning of her harsh cruel words.

"And you tell me this in that brutal way," he said at length. "Die! I, who was so full of life and hope, but yesterday! I, who am only thirty-four! Have you no pity, Nellie?"

"Yes, the same that you had for me when you left me alone in London, wretched and penniless," she replied, in clear cutting tones. "If my husband is holy, remember, I am not."

He sighed, and moved restlessly, murmuring:

"It is my own fault, I deserve it Nellie, if I die as you say I must, die without confessing anything, will you forgive me? Will my death atone for my sins?"

"Yes, I will forgive you, will try to think kindly of you even, but you must not live. He must not, shall not suffer. For his sake I would do anything, for his sake you must die."

And wearied with pain, and bereft of hope, with no desire to live—in the early hours of the next morning he died.

When it was all over, the anxiety and strain at an end, she threw herself into the rector's arms, and wept as though her heart would break, and he soothed and comforted her, as only he could. A few days later he took her to Italy. She needed a change of scene and air, after the sad event which had so tried and upset her delicate, highly strung nerves; and in Italy he discovered what a creature of whims and quaint ideas she was. Coming suddenly one morning upon a tiny Roman Catholic chapel, almost hidden in a nest of trees, she gazed enraptured at it.

"I should so like to be married in just such a dear little church," she exclaimed. "Oh John! may we? do say yes."

"But my darling, how can that be, when we are already married?" he answered in surprise.

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"I know," she replied earnestly, "but I was brought up in the Roman Catholic faith, and somehow I cannot quite shake off its superstitions, and our marriage seems to me hardly any marriage at all, because it was performed only in a Protestant Church. Let us be married over again, and I shall be perfectly happy and satisfied. And after all it cannot matter, I shall be doubly yours then, and the tie can never be too close that unites me to you."

How could he refuse her when she spoke like this? And if she really had a scruple about the validity of their marriage why not humour her? It only meant procuring a license and witness; and so never for one moment imagining her real secret motive he consented, and they were married.

It was a lovely sunny day—the day of their marriage, and their hearts were atune with it.

"How inscrutable are the ways of Providence," the rector observed, looking at his wife's radiant face, "that we should be so happy, and others so unhappy. That poor fellow who died at our house, for instance—I hoped that he would live, and be restored to the wife he spoke of; I prayed so fervently tha the might, but it was not to be, my prayer was unanswered."

She looked at him long before replying, as if in deep meditation, then she said seriously:

"Do you remember once telling me that if our prayers were unanswered it was all for the best, for our good that it was so? Perhaps it was so in this case. Perhaps it was best for his wife, best for all concerned, that he should die. If you can understand what I mean perhaps God answered your prayer by not answering it."

"Perhaps so," her husband asserted thoughtfully. He was delighted that she should talk in this manner At last she took an interest in these matters. She was beginning to be "good." VERA BROWNING.

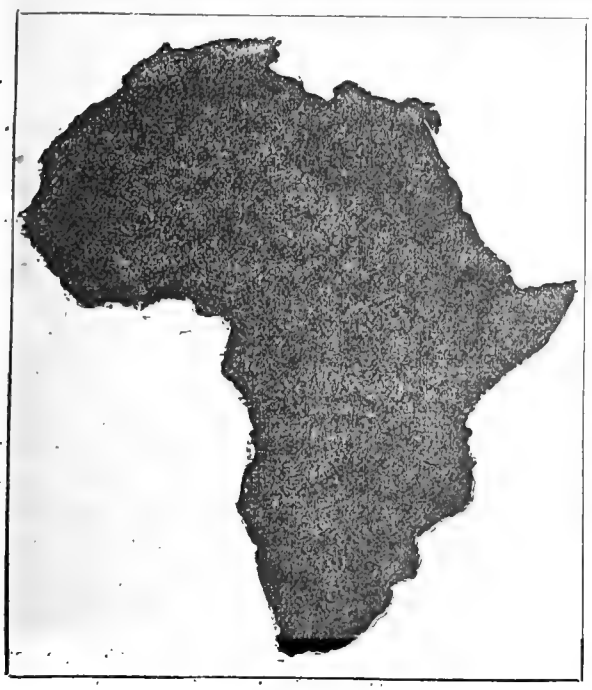
RESULT OF THE "TWO WIRE STITCHES" COMPETITION.

THIS competition was taken up by many readers, and most of the articles sent were very well made. Several competitors seem to have had a difficulty in making the wire bend, but if they had heated it it would have been much more pliable.

Some of the articles which were most carefully finished off are reproduced above.

The sender of the best made article is **F. Moore, 11 Lorne Street Fairfield, Liverpool,** to whom I am sending the first prize of One Guinea.

The next best, to each of whom one of our stereoscopes is being sent, are: P. A. Smith, 1 Crosby Villas, Dyson's Lane, Upper Edmonton, N.; H. Frisby, 17 Dover Buildings, Old Kent Road, S.E.; S. W. Baker, 1A Calverley Road, Eastbourne; W. Benwell, 1 Ernest Place, Whitehead Road, Aston; C. Whybourne, 1 The Pavement, New Malden, Surrey; G. Dowman, 150 St. James Road, Tunbridge Wells; G. Heitzmann, 29 Noel Street, Islington, N.; H. Horn, 211 Blackfriars Road, S.E.



"SHORT STORIES" SILHOUETTE COMPETITION

THIS competition seems to have been very popular, no doubt on account of it being such an easy one.

When properly pasted up, the pieces assume the shape of the

"DARK CONTINENT,"

of which we give a reduction.

The entries were very numerous, and the result is that 224 of our readers sent in correct solutions.

It would be ridiculous to attempt to share the first prize of £5 among the winners, as it would not average sixpence each, so I have sent one of Pearson's stereoscopes to each of the 224 correct competitors.

IF YOU CAN'T DRAW PICTURES,

the probabilities are that you can make a clever illustration by cutting out pieces from different sketches and making a good picture by pasting them together.

We will give £2 2s., £1 1s., twenty-five stereoscopes, and ten silver-plated pencil-cases for the best pictures we receive made up entirely of illustrations which appear in

PASTIMES

during the first three weeks in February, dated February 3rd, 10th, and 17th.

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The Story of a Ring.

I SAT spinning at my little wheel in the sun, for the autumn day was cold, when I heard some one whistling, and, looking up, there was young Squire Turner, with his arms folded on the gate, looking towards me. When he caught my eye he laughed. I blushed, and made him a courtesy.

He was a handsome gentleman, the squire, and he was bonny to look at with his hair like spun gold in the October sunlight.

When I courtesied he bowed, and, said he:

"I've spoiled one pretty picture that I could have looked at all day, but I've made another as pretty, so I'll not grieve. May I come in?"

"And welcome, sir," said I, and I set a chair, for he was grandfather's landlord; but for all that I felt uncomfortable, for I was not used to fine company.

He talked away, paying me more compliments than I was used to, for grandmother, who brought me up, said:

"Handsome is as handsome does," and "Beauty is but skin deep."

Since I'm telling the story, I'll tell the truth. I had done wrong about one thing.

Neither of the old folks knew that I wore Evan Locke's ring in my bosom, or that we'd taken a vow to each other beside the hawthorn that grew in the church lane. I never meant to deceive, but grannie was old and a little hard, and that love of mine was such a sweet secret.

Besides, money seems to outweigh all else when people have struggled all their lives through to turn a penny, and they knew that Evan was a poor, struggling young surgeon.

I thought I'd wait a while until I could sweeten the news with the fact that he'd begun to make his fortune.

Grannie came in from the dairy five minutes after the squire was gone and heard he had been there. I didn't tell her of his fine speeches, but there was a keyhole to the door she came through and I have a guess she heard them.

That night we had something else to think of.

Misfortunes had come upon grandfather; but I didn't foresee that when the half year's rent should come due not a penny to pay it with would be found.

All this time Evan Locke and I had been as fond as ever of each other, and he came as often as before to talk with grandpa on the winter nights; and still every little while our young landlord, Squire Turner, would drop in and sit in his lazy way and watch me knit or spin.

Once or twice he was flushed with wine and over bold, for he tried to kiss me. But squire or no, I boxed his ears for his pains, and no softer than I could help either.

I could not help his coming, nor help seeing him when he came, and I did not deserve that Evan should be angry with me.

But he was. Eh, so high and mighty, and spoke as high as though one like the squire could mean no good by coming to so poor a place as the schoolmaster's.

He made me angry and I spoke up.

"For that matter the squire would be glad to have me promise to marry him," said I. "He thinks more of me than——"

"May be you like him better!" said Evan,

"I don't say that," replied I. "But bad temper and jealousy scarce ever make me fond of another. I pray I may never have a husband who will scold me."

For he had been scolding me. No other name for it.

Well, Evan was wroth with me and I with him—not heart deep, though, I thought—and I did not see him for more than a week.

I was troubled much, though, I knew he would come round again, and mayhap ask my pardon. For before you are wed you can bring your lover to his senses.

So I did not fret after Evan's absence, nor quite snub Squire Turner, who liked me more than ever. But one night grandfather came in, and shutting the door

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stood between grandmamma and me, looking at me, and so strangely that we both grew frightened.

At last he spoke:

"I've been to the squire's," said he. "For the first time I had to tell him that I could not pay the rent when due."

I opened my lips. Grandmamma's hand covered them. Grandpa drew me to him.

"Thou'rt young, lass," said he, "and they are right who call thee pretty. Child—couldst like the squire well enough to wed him?"

"Eh?" cried grandma. "Sure you're not wandering?"

"Squire Turner asked me for this lass of ours to-night. Of all women in the world there is but one he loves as he should his wife, and that is our Agatha."

"I dreamt of golden rings and white roses on Christmas eve," cried Grannie. "I knew the lass would be lucky."

But I put my head on grandfather's shoulder and hid my face.

The truth must come out, I knew.

"Wilt have him and be a rich lady?" said grandpa.

And when he had waited for an answer I burst out with "No," and a sob together.

"She's frightened," said grandmamma. "Nay, we must all wed once in our lives, my child."

I sat spinning at my little wheel, in the sun, when I heard someone whistling, and, looking up, there was young Squire Turner, with his arms folded on the gate, looking towards me.

Then grandpa talked to me.

He told me how poor they had grown, and how kind the squire was, and I had but to marry him to make my grandparents free from debt and poverty all their lives through.

If I refused and vexed the squire heaven only knew what might happen.

"She'll never ruin us," sobbed grandmamma.

Ah! it was hard to bear—bitterly hard; but now there was no help for it, I took the ring from my bosom and laid it on my palm, and told them it was Evan Locke's and that I had plighted my troth to him.

And grandmamma called me a deceitful wench, and grandfather looked as if his heart would break.

Oh, I would have done anything for them but give up my true love.

That night I kissed his ring and prayed heaven that he might love me always. In the morning it was gone, ribbon and all, from my neck.

I looked for it high and low, but found no sign of it. And I began to fear the loss of that dear ring was a sign that I would never marry Evan Locke.

The days passed on, and he never came near me.

"Oh, it was cruel in him," I thought, "to hold such anger for a hasty work he had provoked, when I spoke it that he must know I loved him so."

And grandma would scarcely look at me (I know why now), and grandpa sighed and moaned and talked of being turned out of his home. And I thought I should die of grief among them.

One day grandma said to me:

"It seems that your sweetheart is not over fond of you, nor over anxious to see you."

"Why not?" said I.

"Where has he been this month back?" asked grandma.

"Busy, doubtless," said I, with a smile, though I thought my heart would burst.

"You're going with him, maybe."

"Where?" said I.

She went to the kitchen door and beckoned in a woman who sat there—Dame Coombs, who had come over with eggs.

"I heard you rightly," she said. "You told me Evan Locke and his mother were making ready for a voyage."

"They're going to Canada. My son, a carpenter—and a good one, though I say it—made the doctor a box for his things. The old lady dreads the new country, but she goes for the doctor's sake. There's money to be made there."

"I told you so," said grandmother.

"I don't believe it," said I.

"They've sold the house and gone to Liverpool to take ship; and you may find the truth for yourself, if you choose to take the trouble," said Dame Coombs. "I'm no chatterbox, to tell falsehoods about my neighbours."

And still I would not believe it until I had walked across the moor and had seen the shutters fast closed and the door barred, and not a sign of life about the place.

Then I gave up hope. I went home all pale and trembling, and sat down at grandmamma's knee.

"It's true," said I.

"And for the sake of so false a lad you'll see your grandfather ruined and break his heart, and leave me, that have nursed you from a babe, a widow."

I looked at her as she sobbed, and I found strength to say

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And one night the pain in my heart grew too great, and I went out among the purple heather on the moor, and there knelt down under the stars and prayed to be taken from the world.

"Give me to whom you will then, since my own love does not want me."

And then I crept upstairs and sat down on my bedside weak as though I had fainted.

I would have thanked heaven for forgetfulness just then, but it wouldn't come.

The next day Squire Turner was in the parlour as my accepted lover.

How pleased he was, and how the colour came back into grandfather's old face! And grannie grew so proud and kind, and all the house was aglow, and only I sad.

But I couldn't forget Evan—Evan whom I had loved so—sailing away from me without a word.

I suppose they all saw I looked sad.

The squire talked of my health, and would make me ride with him over the moors for strength.

The old folks said nothing. They knew what ailed me; only our little Scotch maid seemed to think there was aught wrong.

Once she said to me:

"What ails ye, miss? Your eye is dull and your cheek is pale, and your braw grand lover canna make ye smile; ye are na that ill, either."

"No, I am well enough," said I.

She looked at me wistfully.

"Gin ye'd tell me your all, I might tell ye a cure," she said.

But there was no cure for me in this world, and I couldn't open my heart to simple Jennie. So the days rolled by, and I was close on my marriage eve, and grannie and Dorothy Plume were busy with my wedding robes. I wished it were my shroud they were working at instead.

And one night the pain in my heart grew too great, and I went out among the purple heather on the moor, and there knelt down under the stars and prayed to be taken from the world, "for how can I live without Evan?" I said.

I spoke the words aloud, and then started up in affright, for there at my side was an elfish little figure, and I heard a cry that at first I scarce thought earthly. Yet it was but Scotch Jennie, who had followed me.

"Why do ye call for your true love now?" she said, "ye sent him fra ye for sake o' the young squire."

"How dare you follow and watch me?"

But she caught my sleeve.

"Dinna be vexed," she said. "Just bide a wee, and answer what I speer. It's for love of you, for I've seen ye waste like the snaw wreath in the sun sin the squire wooed ye. Was it your will the lad that loved the ground ye trod on should have his ring again?"

"What do you mean?" said I.

"I'll speak gin I lose my place," said Jennie. "I rode with the mistress to young Dr. Locke's place past the moor, and there she lighted and gave him a ring, and what she said I know not, but it turned him the tint o' death, and said he, 'There's na a drop o' true bluid in a woman 'gin she is false.' And he turned to wall and covered his eyes, an' your grannie rode home. There 'tis all I ken—wull it do?"

"Ay, Jennie," said I, "heaven bless you!"

And had I wings on my feet I could not have come to the cottage door sooner.

I stood before my grandmother, trembling and white, and I said:

"Oh, don't tell me, grannie, you have cheated me and robbed me of my true love by a lie. Did you steal the troth ring from my neck and give it back to Evan, as if from me? You I've loved and honoured my life long——"

She turned scarlet.

"True love!" she said, "you've but one true love now—Squire Turner."

"You have done it!" I cried. "It's written on your face."

And she looked down at that and fell to weeping.

"My own true love was breaking his heart," she said. "My husband and I had loved for forty years. I did it to save him. Could I let a girl's fancy, worth nothing, stand in my way, and see him a beggar in his old age? Oh, girl, girl!"

And then I fell down at her feet like a stone. I knew nothing for an hour or more; but then, when I was better, and they left me with Jennie, I bade her fetch my hood and cloak and her own and come with me, and away I went across the moor in the starlight to where

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the hall windows were ablaze with light, and asked the housekeeper to let me see the squire.

She stared at me for my boldness—no wonder—but called him. So in a moment he stood before me, with his cheeks flushed and his eyes bright, and led me into a little room and seated me.

"Agatha, my love, I hope no mischance brings you here."

But I stopped him.

"Not your love, Squire," I said. "I thank you for thinking so well of me, but after all that has passed I——"

I could say no more. He took my hand.

"Have I offended you, Agatha?" he said.

"Not you. The offence—the guilt—oh, I have been sorely cheated!" And all I could do was to sob.

At last strength came to me. I went back to the first and told him all—how we had been plighted to each other, waiting only for better prospects to be wed, and how, when he honoured me by an offer of his hand, I angered my grandmother by owning to the truth, and of the ring grannie had stolen from my breast and the false message that had been sent my promised husband from me.

"And though I never see Evan Locke again," said I, "still I can never be another man's true love, for I am his until I die."

Then as I looked all the rich colour faded out of the squire's face, and I saw the sight we seldom see more than once in a lifetime—a strong young man in tears.

At last he arose and came to me.

"My little Agatha never loved me," he said. "Ah, me! the news is bad—I thought she did. This comes of vanity."

"Many a higher and fairer have hearts to give," I said. "Mine was gone ere you saw me."

And then, kind and gentle, as though I had not grieved him, he gave me his arm and saw me across the moor, and at the gate paused and whispered:

"Be at rest, Agatha. The *Golden George* has not sailed yet."

He took my hand. "Have offended you, Agatha?" he said.

I liked him better than I had ever done before that night when I told grannie that I would never wed him.

Eh! but he was fit to be a king—the grandest, kindest, best of living men, who rode away with the break of the morrow and never stopped till he reached Liverpool and found Evan Locke just ready to set foot upon the *Golden George*, and told him a tale that made his heart light and sent him back to me. Heaven bless him!

And who was it that sent old grandfather the deed of gift that made the cottage his own; and who spoke a kind word to the gentry for young Dr. Locke that helped him into practice? Still no one but the good Squire Turner, whom we taught our children to pray for every night.

For we were married, and in a few years had boys and girls at our knees; and when the eldest was nigh two, the thing I needed to make me quite happy happened—and from far over the sea, where he had been three twelvemonths, came our squire with the bonniest lady that ever blushed beside him, and the hall had a mistress at last—a mistress who loved the squire as I loved my Evan.

Eh! but it's an old story. She that I remembered a girl I saw in her coffin, withered and old. And then they opened the vault where the squire had slept ten years to put her beside him; and I've nothing left of Evan, my life and my love, but his memory, and it seems as if every hope and dream of joy I ever had was put away under tombstones. And even the *Golden George*, the great strong ship that would have borne my dear from me, has mouldered away at the bottom of the sea. And I think my wedding ring is like to outlast us all, for I have it yet, and I shall be ninety to-morrow.

Ninety! It's a good old age, and it can't be long now before I meet Evan and the rest in Heaven.

F. C. WOODSTONE.

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humourous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of Mr. G. Manville Fenn's "The Vibart Affair" to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source must be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. C Goolding, 335 Liverpool Road, N. Attempts for this week's prize may deal with any subject, and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, January 29th. Post-cards only, please.

"Said Sarcastic."

AN enthusiastic Yeomanry recruit, albeit not noted for his good riding, was well-known as an admirer of the fair sex.

During some recent manœuvres, he had the misfortune to have a rather frisky horse, which began to prance directly the band started. This caused the rider to lose his stirrups, and he only saved himself from a fall by clinging on to his horse's neck.

A sweep passing by, seeing him in this position, shouted out, much to the amusement of the crowd:

"Stop a kissing 'er, guv'nor, there's no mistletoe about."

Cured Them in Once.

SOME few years back the officer in command of the Royal Marines on board of one of H.M. battleships was much exercised in his mind as how to deal with two of his men who were continually fighting. Threats, pack-drill, and even "cells" were tried, but were of no avail. No sooner were they free than they flew at one another, and were at it again with worse results than before.

At last he hit on a very happy expedient. The next time the men were brought before him he set them to clean all the large windows on board, one inside, the other out, and neither to go to the next window till the other had finished.

The next morning they started, and after glaring at one another for three or four windows, the situation became too ludicrous and they both burst out laughing and have been good friends ever since.

A Good Reason For Why.

JUST after the Battle of Magersfontein, in South Africa, where the gallant 42nd Highlanders were almost cut up, an Irishman belonging to the same was seen the next morning turning over a huge heap of broken implements of warfare in search of something.

"What are you doing there, Private Murphy?" shouted an officer.

"Beg pardon, sor," was the quick reply, "but Oi'm lookin' for Private McCabe's helmet."

The officer then walked a few yards away, when a sudden thought struck him, so he shouted back:

"Why doesn't Private McCabe look for his own helmet?"

"'Cause his head was in it!" came the unexpected reply, and the officer walked away dumfounded.

Editors Are Not Thieves.

A RURAL preacher, finding the weather too warm, pulled off his coat and preached in his shirt-sleeves. After the sermon, a good brother, thinking an editor who was present would make a sensation of the incident, said to the parson:

"I don't suppose you knew, when you pulled off your coat to-day, that one of them newspaper fellers was at the meetin'?"

"Yes, I did," replied the preacher. "But I had my eye on the coat all the time!"

Where Democracy is Perfect.

THE spirit of democracy is dominant in Aberdeen. A little while before the city election a candidate for an office thought he would call on a few of the leading city councillors. He hailed a cab, and told the cabman to drive him to Councillor Bissett, the treasurer.

The councillor was found in a blacksmith's shop, shoeing a horse. "I'll see somebody better than this," said the candidate. "Drive me to Councillor Maitland's."

The cabman thereupon drove him to the pawnbroker's.

"Drive me to Councillor Gray's."

"I'm Councillor Gray, sir," replied the cabman.

He Didn't Stay There.

HALF-A-DOZEN commercials foregathered recently in a railway carriage, and as they neared a station where all tickets were inspected, the traveller nearest the door held out his hand for the bits of pasteboard, which his companions handed to him. He pretended to drop one ticket out of the window, and said:

"My goodness, Jones, I've lost your ticket! Get under the seat, quick!"

Alarmed and flurried, Jones obeyed. The train ran into the station, and the collector came up for the tickets, which were given him.

"Six tickets, five passengers?" he said with an inquiring look round.

"Oh, yes," explained the commercial nearest the door. "Jones always prefers to travel under the seat. See!"

The collector looked underneath the seat, and there, sure enough, was the sixth traveller. The collector said nothing, but it was evident that he had received a shock.

What Jones said had better not even be hinted at.

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The Call to Arms.

ONE of our brave volunteers was sitting at tea with his mother when the postman arrived with a letter, on the envelope of which were the words "On Her Majesty's Service."

"Mother," said the brave volunteer, "it has come at last; I was expecting it every day."

"Go, then, my son, and do your duty to your Queen and country," said his mother.

The son then opened the letter, only to find that it was a notice to inform him that the dog tax was due.

Not the First, Nor the Last.

AT a concert held in Sheffield recently, an artiste, having just concluded with a screaming sketch, was greatly applauded by the audience.

Upon stepping back to fill the vacant chair he had just previously left (each chair upon the stage was decorated with a British flag) he unfortunately alighted upon the floor instead of the chair.

This naturally caused a good deal of laughter amongst the company assembled. But the artiste was equal to the occasion.

"Ah well," he remarked, arising from his unhappy position, "I'm not the first one who has come to grief by trying to sit on the British flag."

This witty remark was the hit of the evening.

"No Use Bossin'."

A HULL bricklayer, who, on the death of a relative, had come into a fortune of a few hundred pounds decided to set up as a master builder, and as a commencement entered into a contract to erect a small villa. The building was started, but our friend soon found that an employer's life is not one of unalloyed bliss.

An old friend chanced to pass the house one morning, and was astonished to find his mate of other days wielding the trowel once more, and superintending him and other workmen was a strange foreman.

The following conversation ensued:

"Why, Jack, lad! How's this? I thought you was a gaffer noo!"

"So I is, man, so I is. But I soon found I was no use bossin' the men, so I determined to go to wark agen meself, and I've hired yon chap to look after us."

Marrying a Widow.

MRS. WILLIAMS is a widow with three boys, whom she has brought up with great firmness. It is one of her rules that obedience to her commands must come immediately, and explanation, if at all, at her leisure.

"Freddy," she said to her youngest boy, aged seven, "I am going to do something in a few days about which I want to talk to you a little."

"Yes, mamma," responded Freddy meekly.

"I am intending to marry Dr. Morse on Monday next week," said the lady, and then she paused for a moment.

"Yes, mamma," said Freddy again; then he added, with a look of awe on his small face: "I s'pose Dr. Morse won't know anything about it till the time comes, will he, mother?"

He Knew a Thing or Two.

SIR CHARLES GAVAN DUFFY—a former Premier of the Australian colony of Victoria—was once made the object of a peculiar embarrassment. A man on a public occasion presented himself to Sir Charles, who had been appointed to some petty Government office after a campaign in which there had been questionable electoral practices.

"I suppose," said Sir Charles, "that you are one of my supporters?"

"Three of them," answered the man, with a wink that was impossible to misunderstand.

He Visited His Uncle's.

A RATHER seedy and penniless man was passing down the Salt Market in Glasgow the other day, at the same time feeling very dry, entered a pawnshop and asked what they would give him on his coat.

The assistant eyed the coat with curiosity, then quietly advised him to take it to the nearest rag-store.

So feeling rather down in the mouth he entered a rag-store, threw the coat on the scales, expecting to get at least the price of one drink.

But imagine his dismay when the assistant, after examining it, coolly asked whether he would have a bit of toffee or a balloon.

Practical Demonstration.

A RESIDENT of Kingston recently engaged a boy to run errands and make himself generally useful. The lad, who was rather "green," was sent the other morning into the fowl-house to fetch the eggs.

"Go and see if there are any eggs," said his mistress, "but don't bring the china ones."

The lad departed, and in about five minutes' time reappeared with a few shells in his hands, and the front of his coat smeared all over with the contents of the eggs.

"Whatever have you been up to?" shouted the good lady.

"Why," said the boy, "you told me not to bring the china ones, and how could I tell which were china and which were not unless I broke 'em?"

Paid off.

His Free Confession.

THE following story, which hails from a North Country town, shows there are widely varying ideas as to what constitutes voluntary testimony on any subject.

"Did I understand you to say that this boy voluntarily confessed his share in the mischief done to the school-house?" asked the magistrate, addressing the determined-looking female parent of a small and dirty boy.

"Yes, sir, he did," the woman responded. "I just had to persuade him a little, and then he told me the whole thing voluntarily."

"How did you persuade him?" queried his worship.

"Well, first I gave him a good hiding," said the firm parent, "and then I put him to bed without any supper, and took his clothes away, and told him he'd stay in bed till he confessed what he'd done, if 'twas the rest of his days, and I should thrash him again in the morning. And in less than an hour he told me the whole story voluntarily."

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AN OLD BAILEY MYSTERY.

I DOUBT if any young man ever passed through such a varied experience as I met with when in the employ of Messrs. Lockyer and Legatt, the well-known firm of solicitors. For a time they were absolutely at the top of the tree, and one *cause célèbre* after another was placed in their hands. One secret of their success lay in the fact that they believed in retaining young and promising barristers with their way to make, rather than briefing counsel of assured position. By this means they discovered several budding geniuses, who would devote more time for considerably less money than their more comfortably placed brethren.

One of their pet *protégés* was Frank Mayhew, indeed old Lockyer prophesied great things of him, declaring he was a second Sergeant Ballantyne. I rather fancy the chief reason for his belief in Mayhew lay in the fact of the latter's engagement to Miss Connie Lockyer, the old man holding fast to the doctrine of "Cry me, and I'll cry thee."

I by no means shared my principal's enthusiasm for Mayhew, judging him, in fact, to be more of a steady goer than a showy speaker, nor blessed with "the gift of tongues," though plodding and painstaking to a degree.

I confess, therefore, that I felt surprised when I learnt that the firm had briefed him to appear for Stephen Leonard, who, as you will all remember, was charged with obtaining money by threats and menaces.

It was a strange case and at the time made a great stir, not only in the newspaper world, but throughout society. Stephen was a handsome ne'er-do-well, who had been shipped off to Australia by his sorrowing relatives so that he might disgrace himself, rather than them. That he would do both was, I firmly believe, greatly desired by the prime instigator of his banishment. This individual was a cousin of Stephen's father who since the latter's death had gained great influence over Mrs. Leonard, and who contrived in the course of a few years to gain the foolish woman's heart and fortune. To make a long story short, after some six years absence Stephen returned to find his mother dead and his step-father in possession of the property.

High words passed between them, and it is small wonder if the young man let indignation get the better of discretion, for it is no small thing to find your bitterest enemy in possession of the money that by all the laws of justice and of equity should be your own. Stephen's father had died a rich man, leaving all his property to his wife, to dispose of as she should so please, and the silly woman had pleased to leave her son penniless, to enrich the man he hated.

Finally, young Leonard held a pistol to Robert Grainger's head, and under threats of murder the wretched man was induced to sign a cheque for £15,000. Any other man but Stephen would have got clear of the country within twenty-four hours, but devil-may-care Steve must needs fool about for over a week, and when at last he stepped aboard a "liner" bound to the "States" he was greeted by a 'tec.

A woman had been seen with him in Liverpool but with their usual cleverness the police had neglected to detain her and since then she had skilfully managed to elude capture. Who, or what she was no one knew, but it was rumoured that she had made away with the greater part of the money, as but a small portion of the £15,000 could be traced.

Public sympathy ran in favour of the prisoner, but my opinion of his chance of getting off was but a poor one. The facts of the case were dead against him, all that he could hope for was a recommendation to mercy and a light sentence.

Even such hopes as these were to my mind not increased by the advocacy of Frank Mayhew. The surprise that so young and unknown a barrister should have been retained in so important a case was universal and as the time grew near Lockyer himself seemed to feel mistrust as to the capacity of the man on whom so much depended.

Leonard was utterly indifferent as to who was briefed on his behalf; the poor fellow alternated between fits of rage and a state of extreme depression. Chief among his anxieties appeared to be the safety of the woman whom the police had "missed" at Liverpool; so long as she was not taken he appeared to worry little as to the result of his trial.

"I shall know my fate soon enough," he said with a shrug. "Anyway, Granger hasn't got the money."

It was an anxious time for all of us more or less. Lockyer grew more irritable and Mayhew more nervous daily. In fact the latter's state somewhat alarmed me and I was fully prepared for him to break down any minute. Whatever else might be said no one could deny that a more hardworking counsel it were difficult to find; early and late he studied, compiling facts figures, and statistics as to the property possessed by Robert Grainger, with painstaking elaboration as futile as it was foolish.

One would have thought the man was going to contest a chancery bequest, instead of defending a prisoner at the Old Bailey. However that might be he fagged himself to the verge of brain fever, with the result that on the eve of the trial, he broke down and in a state of feverish exhaustion was peremptorily ordered to bed.

I shan't easily forget that afternoon, I can tell you. When the message arrived old Lockyer fairly lost his head. He raved, blasphemed, tore his hair, and anathematised himself and everyone else. Then, all but in tears, he took a cab and drove to Mayhew's house, where—as I afterwards learnt—he was with difficulty prevented from dragging his unfortunate prospective son-in-law out of bed.

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He returned to the office somewhat jaded but more subdued.

"What on earth we're to do, I don't know, Transom," he confided to me. "There's not a big man that would take it up for love or money so late as this and I simply daren't trust it to a junior."

"Best send round for Mayhew's papers," I said, "and start instructing Davidson. He's very fairly smart and thoroughly understands the line his 'lead' was going to take up. Anyway he'll make a better show than a stranger."

Lockyer gazed at me in a hopeless sort of fashion but at last signified his assent to the proposal, and I went round poste haste to Mayhew's.

I returned with the papers to find Lockyer closeted with a mysterious individual, who, according to that ubiquitous being, the office boy, had called soon after I left with a "lidy," the aforesaid "lidy" having departed some few minutes before I arrived.

I waited patiently for half-an-hour, when, there being no signs of the conference ending nor, equally strange, of Davidson having been sent for, I knocked at the door.

Lockyer came out with a queer expression on his face —half perplexed, half pleased.

"Let me have the papers, Transom," he said. "And I don't think you need wait. I half fancy Mayhew will be well enough to appear to-morrow, anyway don't mention his illness."

Considering I'd just left Mayhew tossing about with a temperature a good deal higher than his doctor cared about, such a statement was hardly likely to inspire me with confidence, I suppose my face expressed a part, at any rate, of my surprise, for he suddenly drew quite close to me and whispered emphatically:

"I can't explain now, Transome, but you may rest assured that we shall pull it off to-morrow. Unless," he added, with true lawyer's caution, "something unexpected happens."

Considerably mystified I took my leave, wondering what was up, and feeling, if the truth were known, more anxious about Stephen than Mayhew.

The court was packed the following day. All the best dressed women, no less than the most popular men, in or about town, were in evidence. Newspaper artists jostled society reporters, while as many of the junior bar as could cram in leavened the whole.

Stephen Leonard looked well and remained perfectly impassive throughout the proceedings. Only once did he show traces of emotion, and that was when his counsel commenced to speak.

I say, "counsel" but who and what the man could be who appeared for him I for one could not determine. I had left Mayhew that morning, in fact not half an hour ago, in a darkened room, delirious with pain, and too weak to lift a finger. Yet had it not been for my positive knowledge to the contrary, I could have sworn that it was Mayhew, and no other, who spoke in such impassioned and soul stirring accents. The same strongly marked eyebrows, nervous lips and aquiline nose, the same irresolute movements of the hand. Face, figure, gestures, voice—ah! no, there at least was a dissimilarity. Mayhew possessed an even, almost a monotonous delivery, and his voice, though not unpleasing, was neither strong nor telling. The deep, strong tones that echoed through the hall, vibrating with tenderness, roused to passion, sinking to entreaty only to rise upon a storm of indignation and contempt, who but a fool could have supposed that it was Mayhew who so played upon the hearts of all who heard him?

As I say, Leonard had given a start when the speech for the defence commenced, and throughout the whole of what was considered one of the finest orations ever listened to in court, he sat gazing at the man in silent but profound astonishment.

As you all know the verdict was "Not Guilty" and for once the jury and the public were agreed.

No one ever suspected that there was a mystery in connection with Mayhew's great success, and for a long time I despaired of ever finding the solution. Lockyer was always conveniently deaf when I approached him on the subject, and Mayhew simply would not answer. I was beginning to fancy that I should have to give it up when chance all unexpectedly put the key into my hands.

I was travelling in the States a year or two later when I ran up against Stephen Leonard. He was always a cheery good-natured sort of chap, and dragged me home to "see his wife," without giving me a chance of refusing.

I found Mrs. Leonard a charming woman with a sweet face and smile, and a voice which reminded me in an odd sort of way of somebody—whom, I could not tell.

After dinner we all went to the theatre. I forget the name of the piece now, suffice it to say that the chief interest lay in a "trial" scene—that good old prop beloved of every dramatist—wherein the hero's innocence is proved at the same time that the villain's wickedness is made manifest.

As the man who played the part of prisoner's counsel took his place, I started to my feet. "Good Heavens," I cried, "it's the man who personated Mayhew."

Leonard hurried me from the theatre and after a little hesitation told me the truth.

At the time he returned to England, he was married, and his wife, who accompanied him, was in very delicate health. He was half mad with anxiety concerning her, and, without means or the hope of getting money save from his step-father, was driven to take the rash and foolish course he had adopted. It was his wife's illness that delayed his departure, and it was—as I had already guessed—his wife who had accompanied him to Liverpool.

"But the barrister—I mean the actor—I mean—in Heaven's name, Leonard, who is the man who won your case?"

"My wife's brother," he replied, "and one of the cleverest actors in America—or for that matter anywhere—and a master of make-up. My wife heard of Mayhew's illness and was convinced that if only her brother, aided by herself and old Lockyer, could appear in Mayhew's stead, the day would be won. The rest you know."

Mayhew, of course, had no choice in the matter, and was quite content to reap the kudos his supposed eloquence had gained him. I often smile to myself when I hear men wonder why it is he never fulfilled the promise of his youth, for needless to relate the defence of Stephen Leonard was Mayhew's one and only hit.

The young fellow himself? Well, next time a certain actor from the States is advertised to play, you go and see him. He's changed a good bit certainly, but he still retains his voice.

But even so, you'll never hear him to the same advantage as I did, when he played the lead in "An Old Bailey Mystery."

J. P.

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Composite Picture Competition.

- RESULT. -

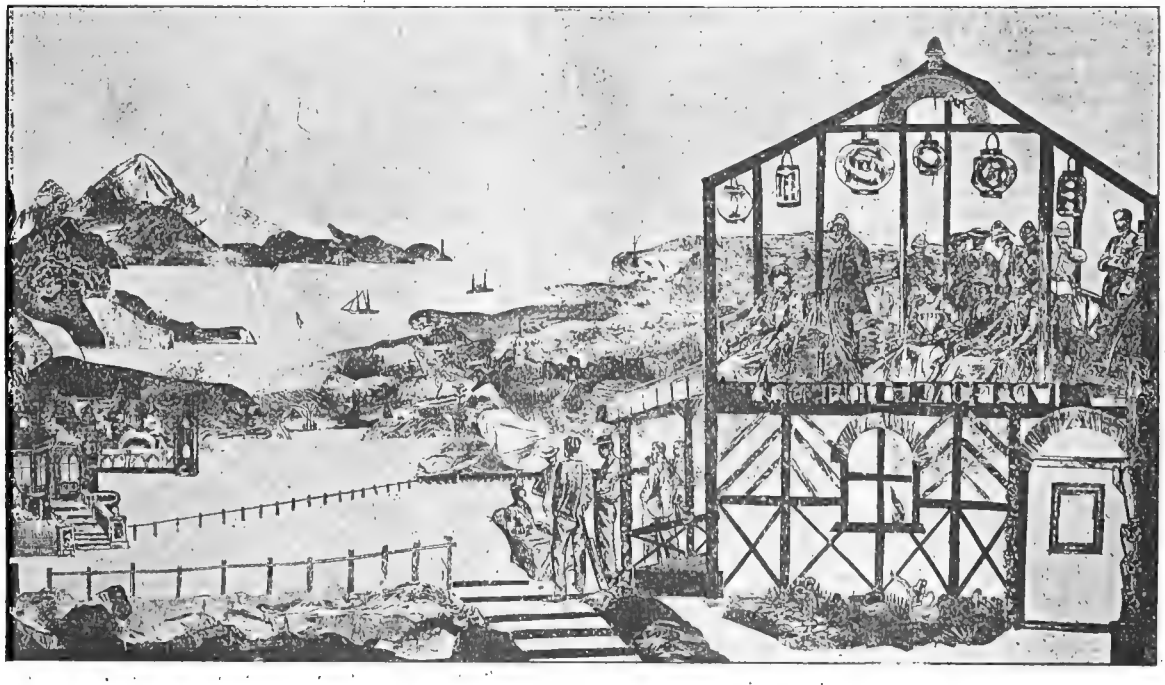
I am delighted with the artistic ability shown by my readers in this competition. Most of the entries were of a high order.

Some of the competitors must have spent a great amount of time and patience on their productions.

I have no hesitation, however, in awarding the first prize of £2 2s. to Mr. Harry Nobbs, 27 Mount Pleasant Road, Stroud Green, N., who not only sent in the largest picture (23in. by 13in.), but also showed most careful attention to detail.

The following is the list of competitors whose pictures merited a prize, and to each of whom one of our stereoscopes has been sent:

J. Allen, 12 Sydney Street, Glasgow; J. Baker, 4 Argyll Street, Darwen, Lancs.; J. Child, 2 Montpellier Terrace, Swansea; N. Douglas, 11 Sinclair Gardens, Kensington, W.; M. Green, 15 Richmond Road, Brighton; E. Hope, Frances Cottage, Goginan, near Aberystwyth, S. Wales; M. Martin, 1 Montague Gardens, Castle Avenue, Dover; A. Plowright, 22 Pine Road, Cricklewood, N.W.; G. Sharples, 5 Fisher Street, Blackpool; W. Yeaman, 174 Regent Street, South Shields, Durham.



"HAPPY DAYS." (The above is a reproduction of the winning picture.)

Making Both Ends Meet.

It should not be difficult to provide a substantial and varied breakfast for two people for five mornings for the sum of five shillings. On the whole, the entries were very good, but some competitors lost sight of the fact that variety in the menus should be considered, and only provided bacon and eggs for every morning. Others forgot that cocoa, although very wholesome and nourishing, is apt to become monotonous if taken every day, and many, too, omitted to provide some little dainty—such as jam, marmalade, or fruit—which is generally liked as a finish up to the first meal of the day. Three or four of the entries were extremely good, and it was hard to decide between them.

However, after reading them through most carefully, and comparing each item, I think that the first prize of £1 1s. is fairly won by Mrs. Pentney, 98 Queen's Road, Dalston, N.E., who has provided menus which are at once economical, varied, and substantial.

The next best twenty, to whom I am sending a copy of Mrs. Williamson's popular six shilling novel, "Fortune's Sport," are:

M. Burt, Mount Pleasant, Ashley Road, Upper Parkstone, Dorset; M. Busby, 5 Eton Place, Plumstead; J. T. Davidson, 184 Slatefield Street, Glasgow; M. Dobson, 103 Beston Hill, Leeds; E. Everest, 74 Barnwell Road, S.W.; T. Fisher, 35 Mentone Mansions, S.W.; E. H. Harland, "Lindale," West Croydon; F. R. Hearse, 15 Vivian Road, E.; A. Herriot, 46 Fauldhouse Street, Glasgow; N. Lang, 25 Colet Gardens, West Kensington; M. Lilly, 97 Westminster Bridge Road, Lambeth; M. Nevin, 26 Balls Road East, Birkenhead; K. Nicol, 70 Clova Road, E.; M. Pritchard, 20 Claxton Grove, Hammersmith; M. Puttet, 111 Shenley Road, S.E.; M. Riley, 22 Myddleton Buildings, Islington, N.; A. Schmiedon, 9 Juxon Street, Lambeth; F. Sentance, 271 Friern Road, S.E.; M. Shepherd, 128 Stephendale Road, Fulham; M. Wright, 18 Brantsfield Avenue, Edinburgh.

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THE ANGEL OF THE REVOLUTION

By GEORGE GRIFFITH

CHAPTER LXI. *(continued).*

After the battles of Dover and Harwich the invading forces advanced upon London in the following order: The Army of the South had landed at Deal, Dover, and Folkestone in three divisions, and after a series of terrific conflicts had fought their way *via* Chatham, Maidstone, and Tunbridge to the banks of the Thames, and occupied all the commanding positions from Shooter's Hill to Richmond. These three forces were composed entirely of French and Italian army corps, and numbered from first to last nearly four million men.

On the north the invading force was almost wholly Russian, and was under the command of the Czar in person, in whom the supreme command of the armies of the League had by common consent been now vested. A constant service of transports plying day and night between Antwerp and Harwich had placed at his disposal a force about equal to that of the Army of the South, although he had lost over seven hundred thousand men before he was able to occupy the line of heights from Hornsey to Hampstead, with flanking positions at Brondesbury and Harlesden to the west, and at Tottenham, Stratford, and Barking to the east.

By the 29th of November all the railways were in the hands of the invaders. A chain of war-balloons between Barking and Shooter's Hill closed the Thames. The forts at Tilbury had been destroyed by an aerial bombardment. A flotilla of submarine torpedo vessels had blown up the defences of the estuary of the Thames and Medway, and led to the fall of Sheerness and Chatham, and had then been docked at Sheerness, there being no further present use for them.

The other half of the squadron, supported by a few battleships and cruisers which had survived the Battle of Dover, had proceeded to Portsmouth, destroyed the booms and submarine defences, while a detachment of aerostats shelled the land defences, and then, in a moment of wanton revenge, had blown up the venerable hulk of the *Victory*, which had gone down at her moorings with her flag still flying as it had done a hundred years before at the fight of Trafalgar. After this inglorious achievement they had been laid up in dock to wait for their next opportunity of destruction, should it ever occur.

London was thus cut off from all communication, not only with the outside world, but even from the rest of England. The remnants of the armies of defence had been gradually driven in upon the vast wilderness of bricks and mortar, which now held more than eight millions of men, women, and children, hemmed in by long lines of batteries and entrenched camps, from which thousands of guns hurled their projectiles far and wide into the crowded masses of the houses, shattering them with bursting shells, and laying whole streets in ruins, while overhead the war-balloons slowly circled hither and thither, dropping their fire-shells and completing the ruin and havoc wrought by the artillery of the siege-trains.

Under such circumstances surrender was really only a matter of time, and that time had very nearly come. The London and North-Western Railway, which had been the last to fall into the hands of the invaders, had been closed for over a week, and food was running very short. Eight millions of people massed together in a space of thirty or forty square miles area can only be fed and kept healthy under the most favourable conditions. Hemmed in as London now was, from being the best ordered great city in the world, it had degenerated with frightful rapidity into a vast abode of plague and famine, a mass of human suffering and misery beyond all conception or possibility of description.

Defence there was now practically none, but still the invaders did not leave their vantage ground on the hills, and not a soldier of the League had so far set foot in London proper. Either the besiegers preferred to starve the great city into surrender at discretion and then extort ruinous terms, or else they hesitated to plunge into that tremendous gulf of human misery, maddened by hunger and made desperate by despair. If they did so hesitate they were wise, for London was too vast to be carried by assault or by any series of assaults.

No army could have lived in its wilderness of streets swarming with enemies who would have fought them from house to house and street to street. Once they had entered that mighty maze of streets and squares both their artillery and their war-balloons would have been useless, for they would only have buried friend and foe in common destruction. There were plenty of ways into London, but the way out was a very different matter.

Had a general assault been attempted, not a man would ever have got out of London alive. The commanders of the League saw this clearly, and so they kept their position on the heights, wasted the city with an almost constant bombardment, and, while they drew their supplies from the fertile lands in their rear, lay on their arms, and waited for the inevitable.

Within the besieged area martial law prevailed universally. Riots were of daily, almost hourly, occurrence, but they were repressed with an iron hand, and the rioters were shot down in the streets without mercy; for, though siege and famine were bad enough, anarchy breaking out amidst that vast sweltering mass of human beings would have been a thousand times worse, and so the King, who, assisted by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Council, had assumed the control of the whole city, had directed that order was to be maintained at any price.

The remains of the army were quartered in the parks under canvas, and billeted in houses throughout the various

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districts, in order to support the police in repressing disorder and protecting property. Still, in spite of all that could be done, matters were rapidly coming to a terrible pass. In a week, at the latest, the horses of the cavalry would be eaten. For a fortnight London had almost lived upon horse-flesh. In the poorer quarters there was not a dog to be seen, and a sewer rat was considered a delicacy.

Eight million mouths had made short work of even the vast supplies that had been hurriedly poured into the city as soon as the invasion had become a certainty, and absolute starvation was now a matter of a few days at the outside. There were millions of money lying idle, but very soon a five-pound note would not buy even a little loaf of bread.

But famine was by no means the only horror that afflicted London during those awful days and nights. All round the heights the booming of cannon sounded incessantly. Huge shells went screaming through the air overhead to fall and burst amidst some swarming hive of humanity, scattering death and mutilation where they fell, and high up in the air the fleet of aerostats perpetually circled, dropping their fire-shells and blasting-cartridges on the dense masses of houses until a hundred conflagrations were raging at once in different parts of the city.

No help had come from outside. Indeed none was to be expected. There was only one Power in the world that was now capable of coping with the forces of the victorious League, but its overtures had been rejected, and neither the King nor any of his advisers had now the slightest idea as to how those who controlled it would now use it. No one knew the real strength of the Terrorists or the Federation which they professed to control.

All that was known was that, if they chose, they could with their aerial fleet sweep the war-balloons from the air in a few moments and destroy the batteries of the besiegers; but they had made no sign after the rejection of their President's offer to prevent the landing of the forces of the League on condition that the British Government accepted the Federation and resigned its powers in favour of its executive.

The refusal of those terms had now cost more than a million British lives, and an incalculable amount of human suffering and destruction of property. Until the news of the disaster of Dover had actually reached London, no one had really believed that it was possible for an invading force to land on British soil and exist for twenty-four hours. Now the impossible had been made possible, and the last crushing blow must fall within the next few days. After that who knew what might befall.

So far as could be seen, Britain lay helpless at the mercy of her foes. Her allies had ceased to exist as independent Powers, and the Russian and the Gaul were thundering at her gates as, fifteen hundred years before, the Goth had thundered at the gates of the Eternal City in the last days of the Roman Empire.

If the terms of the Federation could have been offered again, it is probable that the King of England would have been the first man to own his mistake and that of his advisers and accept them, for now the choice lay between utter and humiliating defeat and the breaking up of the Empire, and the recognition of the Federation. After all, the kinship of a race was a greater fact in the supreme hour of national disaster than the maintenance of a dynasty or the perpetuation of a particular form of government.

It was not now a question of nation against nation, but of race against race. The fierce flood of war had swept away all smaller distinctions. It was necessary to rise to the altitude of the problem of the government, not of nations, but of the world. Was the genius of the East or of the West to shape the future destinies of the human race? That was the mighty problem of which the events of the next few weeks were to work out the solution, for when the sun set on the Field of Armageddon the fate of Humanity would be fixed for centuries to come.

CHAPTER LXII.

An Envoy of Deliverance.

From the time that the Tsar had received the conditional declaration of war from the President of the Anglo-Saxon Federation in America to nightfall on the 29th of November, when the surrender of the capital of the British Empire was considered to be a matter of a few days only, the Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the League was absolutely in the dark, not only as to the actual intentions of the Terrorists, if they had any, but also as to the doings of his allies in America.

According to the stipulations arranged between himself and the confidential agent of the American Government, the blockading flotilla of dynamite cruisers ought to have sailed from America as soon as the cypher message containing the news of the Battle of Dover reached New York. The message had been duly sent, *via* Queenstown and New York, and had been acknowledged in the usual way by the Federation agent at the other end of the cable which had been re-connected for the sole use of the President. This accounted for the fact that no further reply had come to it, and will explain why a month had elapsed without the appearance of the promised squadron.

Other messages had been sent to which no reply had been received, and a swift French cruiser, which had been launched at Brest since the Battle of Dover, had been despatched across the Atlantic to discover the reason of this strange silence. She had gone, but she had never returned. The Atlantic highway appeared to be barred by some invisible force, no vessels came from the westward, and those which started from the east where never heard of again.

His Majesty had treated the summons of the President of the Federation with silent contempt, just as such a victorious autocrat might have been expected to do. True, he knew the terrific power wielded by the Terrorists through their aerial fleet, and he had an uncomfortable conviction, which refused to be entirely stifled, that in the days to come he would have to reckon with the same fleet.

But that a member of the Terrorist brotherhood could by any possible means have placed himself at the head of any body of men sufficiently numerous or well-disciplined to make them a force to be seriously reckoned with in military warfare, his Majesty had never for a moment believed.

And, more than this, however disquieting might be the uncertainty due to the ominous silence on the other side of the Atlantic, and the non-arrival of the expected fleet, there stood the great and significant fact that the army of the League had been permitted, without molestation either from the Terrorists, or the Federation in whose name they had presumed to declare war upon him, not only to destroy what remained of the British fleet, but to completely invest the very capital of Anglo-Saxondom itself.

All this had been done; the sacred soil of Britain itself had been violated by the invading hosts; the army of defence had been slowly, and at a tremendous sacrifice of life on both sides, forced back from line after line, and position after position, into the city itself; his batteries were raining their hail of shot and shell from the heights round London, and his aerostats were hurling ruin from the sky upon the crowded millions locked up in the beleaguered space; and yet the man who had presumed to tell him that the hour in which he set foot on British soil would be the last of his Empire had done absolutely nothing to interrupt the march of conquest.

From this it will be seen that Alexander Romanoff was at least as completely in the dark as to the possible course of the events of the near future as was the King of England himself, shut up in his capital and cut off from all communication from the rest of the world.

On the morning of the 29th of November there was held at the Prime Minister's rooms in Downing Street a Cabinet Council, presided over by the King in person. After the

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Council had remained for about an hour in earnest consultation, a stranger was admitted to the room in which they were sitting.

The reader would have recognised him in a moment as Maurice Colston, otherwise Alexis Mazanoff, for he was dressed almost exactly as he had been on that memorable night, just thirteen months before, when he made the acquaintance of Richard Arnold on the Thames Embankment.

Well-dressed, well-fed, and perfectly at ease, he entered the Council Chamber without any aggressive assumption, but still with the quiet confidence of a man who knows that he is practically master of the situation. How he had even got into London, beleaguered as it was on every side in such fashion that no one could get out of it without being seen and shot by the besiegers, was a mystery, but how he could have in his possession, as he had, a despatch dated thirty-six hours previously in New York was a still deeper mystery, and upon neither of these points did he make the slightest attempt to enlighten the members of the British Cabinet.

All that he said was that he was the bearer of a message from the President of the Anglo-Saxon Federation in America, and that he was instructed to return that night to New York with such answer as the British Government might think fit to make to it. It was this message that had been the subject of the deliberations of the Council before his admission, and its nett effect was as follows.

It was now practically certain, indeed proved to demonstration, that the forces at the command of the British Government were not capable of coping with those brought against them by the commanders of the League, and that, therefore, Britain, if left to her own resources, must inevitably succumb and submit to such terms as her conquerors might think fit to impose upon her.

The choice before the British Government thus lay between surrender to her foreign enemies, whose objects were well known to be dismemberment of the Empire and the reduction of Great Britain to the rank of a third-class Power—to say nothing of the payment of a war-indemnity which could not fail to be paralysing—and the consent of those who controlled the destinies of the mother country to accept a Federation of the whole Anglo-Saxon race, to waive the merely national idea in favour of the racial one, and to permit the Executive Council of the Federation to assume those governmental functions which were exercised at present by the King and the British Houses of Parliament.

In a word, the choice lay between conquest by a league of foreign Powers and the merging of Britain into the Federation of the English-speaking peoples of the world.

If the former choice were taken the only prospect possible under the condition of things was a further enormous sacrifice of human life on the side of both Britain and its enemies, a gigantic loss in money, the crippling of British trade and commerce, and then a possible—nay, probable—social revolution to which the message distinctly pointed.

If the latter choice were taken the forces of the Federation would be at once brought into the field against those of the League, the seige of London would be raised, the power of the invaders would be effectually broken for ever, and the stigma of conquest finally wiped away.

It is only just to record the fact that in this supreme crisis of British history the man who most strongly insisted upon the acceptance of the terms which he had previously, as he now confessed in the most manly and outspoken fashion, rejected in ignorance of the true situation of affairs, was the man who believed that he would lose a crown by accepting them.

When the Ambassador of the Federation had been presented to the Council, the King rose in his place and handed to him with his own hands a sealed letter, saying as he did so:

"Mr. Mazanoff, I am still to a great extent in ignorance as to the inexplicable combination of events which has made it necessary for me to return this affirmative answer to the message of which you are the bearer. I am, however, fully aware that the Earl of Alanmere, whose name I have seen at the foot of this document with the most profound astonishment, is in a position to do what he says.

"The course of events has been exactly that which he predicted. I know, too, that whatever causes may have led him to unite himself to those known as the Terrorists, he is an English nobleman and a man to whom falsehood or bad faith is absolutely impossible. In your marvellous aerial fleet I know also that he wields the only power capable of being successfully opposed to those terrible machines which have wrought such havoc upon the fleets and armies not only of Britain, but of Europe.

"After all, the first duty of a Constitutional King is not to himself and his dynasty, but to his country and his people, and therefore I feel that it will be better for me and mine to be citizens of a free Federation of the English-speaking peoples, and of the nations to which Britain has given birth, than the titular sovereign and Royal family of a conquered country, holding the mockery of Royalty on the sufferance of their conquerors.

"Tell Lord Alanmere from me that I now accept the terms he has offered as President of the Anglo-Saxon Federation, first, because at all hazards I would see Britain delivered from her enemies, and, secondly, because I have chosen rather to be an English gentleman without a crown, than to wear a crown which, after all, would only be a gift from my conquerors."

Edward VII. spoke with visible emotion, but with a dignity which even Mazanoff, little and all as he respected the name of king, felt himself compelled to recognise and respect. He took the letter with a bow that was more one of reverence than of courtesy, and as he put it into the breast-pocket of his coat, he said:

"The President will receive your Majesty's reply with as genuine pleasure as I shall experience in giving it to him. Though I am a Russian, without a drop of English blood in my veins, I have always looked upon the British race as the real bulwark of freedom, and I rejoice that the King of England has not permitted either tradition or personal feeling to stand in the way of the last triumph of the Anglo-Saxon race.

"As long as the English language is spoken your Majesty's name will be held in greater honour for this sacrifice which you make to-day than will that of any other English king for the greatest triumph of arms ever achieved in the history of your country.

"I must now take my leave, for I must be in New York to-morrow night. I have your word that I shall not be watched or followed after I leave here. Hold the city for six days more at all costs, and on the seventh at the latest the seige shall be raised and the enemies of Britain destroyed in their own entrenchments."

So saying, the envoy of the Federation bowed once more to the King and the astonished members of his council, and was escorted to the door.

Once in the street he strode away rapidly through Parliament Street and the Strand, then up Drury Lane, until he reached the door of a mean-looking house in a squalid court, and entering this with a latchkey, disappeared. In half-an hour he emerged a seedy, half-starved looking individual, muffled from head to heel in a long shabby ulster, and made his way northward by Gray's Inn Road towards Chalk Farm.

Three hours later a Russian soldier of the line, wearing an almost imperceptible knot of red ribbon in one of the button-holes of his tunic, passed through the Russian lines on Hampstead Heath unchallenged by the sentries, and made his way northward to Northaw Wood, which he reached soon after nightfall.

Within half-an-hour the *Ithuriel* rose from the midst of a thick clump of trees like a grey shadow rising into the

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night, and darted southward and upward at such a speed that the keenest eyes must soon have lost sight of her from the earth.

She passed over the beleaguered city at a height of nearly ten thousand feet, and then swept sharply round to the eastward. She stopped immediately over the lights of Sheerness, and descended to within a thousand feet of the dock in which could be seen the detachment of the French submarine vessels lying waiting to be sent on their next errand of destruction.

As soon as those on board her had made out the dock clearly she ascended a thousand feet and went about half a mile to the southward. From that position she poured a rapid hail of shells into the dock, which was instantly transformed into a cavity vomiting green flame and fragments of iron and human bodies. In five minutes nothing was left of the dock or its contents but a churned-up swamp of muddy water and shattered stone-work.

Then, her errand so far accomplished, the air-ship sped away to the south-westward, and within an hour she had destroyed in like fashion the submarine squadron in the Government dock at Portsmouth, and was winging her way westward to New York with the reply of the King of England to the President of the Federation.

CHAPTER LXIII.

The Eve of Armageddon.

When the news of the destruction of the two divisions of the submarine squadron reached the headquarters of the League on the evening of the 29th, it would have been difficult to say whether anger or consternation most prevailed among the leaders. A council of war was hurriedly summoned to discuss an event which it was impossible to look upon as anything less than a calamity.

The destruction which had been wrought was of itself disastrous enough, for it deprived the League of the chief means by which it had destroyed the British Fleet, and kept command of the sea. But even more terrible than the actual destruction was the unexpected suddenness with which the blow had been delivered.

For five months, that is to say from the recapture of the *Lucifer* at Aberdeen, the Tzar and his coadjutors had seen nothing of the operations of the Terrorists, and now, without a moment's warning, this apparently omnipresent and yet almost invisible force had struck once more with irresistible effect, and instantly vanished back into the mystery out of which it had come.

Who could tell when the next blow would fall, or in what shape the next assault would be delivered? In the presence of such enemies, invisible and unreachable, the commanders of the League, to their rage and disgust, felt themselves, on the eve of their supreme victory, as impotent as a man armed with a sword would have felt in front of a Gatling gun.

Consternation naturally led to divided councils. The French and Italian commanders were for an immediate general assault on London at all hazards, and the enforcement of terms of surrender at the point of the sword. The Tsar, on the other hand, insisted on the pursuance of the original policy of reduction by starvation, as he rightly considered that, great as the attacking force was, it would be practically swamped amidst the infuriated millions of the besieged, and that, even if the assault were successful, the loss of life would be so enormous that the conquest of the rest of Britain—which in such a case would almost certainly rise to a man—would be next door to impossible.

He, however, so far yielded as to agree to send a message to the King of England to arrange terms of surrender, if possible at once, in order to save further bloodshed, and then, if these terms were rejected, to prepare for a general assault on the seventh day from then.

These terms were accepted as a compromise, and the next morning the bombardment ceased, both from the land batteries and the air. At daybreak on the 30th an envoy left the Tsar's headquarters in one of the war-balloons, flying a flag of truce, and descended in Hyde Park. He was received by the King in council in Buckingham Palace, and, after a lengthy deliberation, an answer was returned to the effect that on condition the bombardment ceased for the time being, London would be surrendered at noon on the 6th of December if no help had by that time arrived from the other cities of Britain. These terms, after considerable opposition from General le Gallifet and General Cosenz, the Italian commander-in-chief, were adopted and ratified at noon that day, almost at the very moment that Alexis Mazanoff was presenting the reply of the King of England to the President of the Federation in New York.

As the relief expedition had been fully decided upon, whether the British Government recognised the Federation or not, everything was in readiness for an immediate start as soon as the *Ithuriel* brought definite news as to the acceptation or rejection of the President's second offer. For the last seven weeks the ten dockyards of the east coast of America, and of Halifax in Nova Scotia, had been thronged with shipping and swarming with workmen and sailors.

All the vessels which had been swept off the Atlantic by the war storm, and which were of sufficient size and speed to take part in the expedition, had been collected at these eleven ports. Whole fleets of liners of half-a-dozen different nationalities which had been laid up since the establishment of the blockade, were now lying alongside the quays taking in vast quantities of wheat and miscellaneous food-stuffs which were being poured into their holds from the glutted markets of America and Canada. Every one of these vessels was fitted up as a troopship, and by the time all arrangements were complete, more than a thousand vessels, carrying on an average twelve hundred men each, were ready to take the sea.

In addition to these there was a fleet of warships as yet unscathed by shot or shell, consisting of thirty battleships, a hundred and ten cruisers, armoured and unarmoured, and the flotilla of dynamite cruisers which had been constructed by the late Government at the expense of the Capitalist Ring. There were no less than two hundred of these strange but terribly destructive craft, the lineal descendants of the *Vesuvius*, which, as the naval reader will remember, was commissioned in 1890.

They were double-hulled vessels built on the whale-back plan, and the compartments between the inner and outer hull could be wholly or partially filled with water. When they were entirely filled the hull sank below the surface, leaving nothing as a mark to an enemy save a platform standing ten feet above the water. This platfom, constructed throughout of six-inch nickel-steel, was of oval shape, a hundred feet long and thirty broad in its greatest diameter, and carried the heavily armoured wheel-house and conning-tower, two funnels, six ventilators, and two huge pneumatic guns, each seventy-five feet long, working on pivots nearly amidships.

These weapons with an air-charge of three hundred atmospheres would throw four hundred pounds of dynamite to a distance of three miles with such accuracy that the projectile would invariably fall within a space of twenty feet square. The guns could be discharged once a minute, and could thus hurl 48,000 lbs. of dynamite an hour upon a hostile fleet or fortifications.

Each cruiser also carried two under-water torpedo tubes ahead and two astern. The funnels emitted no smoke, but merely supplied draught to the petroleum furnaces, which burned with practically no waste and developed a head of steam which drove the long submerged hulls through the water at a rate of thirty-two knots, or more than thirty-six miles an hour.

Such was the enormous naval armament, manned by nearly a hundred thousand men, which hoisted the Federation flag at one o'clock on the afternoon of the 30th of

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November, when orders were telegraphed north and south from Washington to get ready for sea. Two hours later the vast flotilla of warships and transports had cleared American waters, and was converging towards a point indicated by the intersection of the 41st parallel of latitude with the 40th meridian of longitude.

At this ocean rendezvous the divisions of the fleet and its convoys met and shaped their course for the mouth of the English Channel. They proceeded in column of line abreast three deep, headed by the dynamite cruisers, after which came the other warships which had formed the American Navy, and after these again came the troopships and transports properly protected by cruisers on their flanks and in their rear.

The commander of every warship and transport had the most minute instructions as to how he was to act on reaching British waters, and what these were will become apparent in due course. The weather was fairly good for the time of year, and, as there was but little danger of collision on the now deserted waters of the Atlantic, the whole flotilla kept at full speed all the way. As, however, its speed was necessarily limited by that of its slowest steamer until the scene of action was reached, it was after midnight on the 5th of December when its various detachments had reached their appointed stations on the English coast.

At the entrance of the English Channel and St. George's Channel a few scouting cruisers, flying French, Russian, and Italian colours, had been run down and sunk by the dynamite cruisers. Strict orders had been given by Tremayne to destroy everything flying a hostile flag, and not to permit any news to be taken to England of the approach of the flotilla.

The Federation was waging a war, not merely of conquest and revenge, but of extermination, and no mercy was to be shown to its enemies, who had shown none in their march of victory from one end of Europe to another.

While the Federation fleet had been crossing the Atlantic other events no less important had been taking place in England and Scotland. The hitherto apparently inert mass of the population had suddenly awakened out of its lethargy. In town and country alike men forsook their daily avocations as if by one consent. As in America, artisans, pitmen, clerks, and tradesmen, were suddenly transformed into soldiers, who drilled, first in squads of ten, and then in hundreds and thousands, and finally in tens of thousands, all uniformed alike in rough grey breeches and tunics, with a knot of red ribbon in the button-hole, and all armed with rifle, bayonet, and revolver, which they seemed to handle with a strange and ominous familiarity.

All the railway traffic over the island was stopped, and the rolling-stock collected at the great stations along the lines to London, and at the same time all the telegraph wires communicating with the south and east were cut. As day after day passed, signs of an intense but strongly suppressed excitement became more and more visible all over the provinces, and especially in the great towns and cities.

In London very much the same thing had happened. Hundreds of thousands of civilians vanished during those seven days of anxious waiting for the hour of deliverance, and in their place sprang up orderly regiments of grey-clad soldiers, who saw the red knot in each other's button-holes, and welcomed each other as comrades unknown before.

To the surprise of the commanders of the regular army, orders had been issued by the King that all possible assistance was to be rendered to these strange legions, which had thus so suddenly sprung into existence; and the result was that when the sun set on the 5th of December, the twenty-first day of the total blockade of London, the beleaguered space contained over two millions of armed men, hungering both for food and vengeance, who, like the five millions of

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their fellow-countrymen outside London, were waiting for a sign from the sky to fling themselves upon the entrapped and unsuspecting invader.

That night countless eyes were upturned throughout the length and breadth of Britain to the dun pall of wintry cloud that overspread the land. Yet so far, so perfect was the discipline of this gigantic host, not a sign of overt hostile movement had been made, and the commanders of the armies of the League looked forward with exulting confidence to the moment, now only a few hours distant, when the capital of the British Empire, cut off from all help, should be surrendered into their hands in accordance with the terms agreed upon.

When night fell the *Ithuriel* was floating four thousand feet above Aberdeen. Arnold and Natasha, wrapped in warm furs, were standing on deck impatiently watching the sun sinking down over the sea of clouds which lay between them and the earth.

"There it goes at last!" exclaimed Natasha, as the last of the level beams shot across the cloud-sea and the rim of the pale disc sank below the surface of the vapoury ocean. "The time that we have waited and worked for so long has come at last. This is the eve of Armageddon! Who would think it, floating up here above the clouds and beneath those cold, calmly shining stars! And yet the fate of the whole world is trembling in the balance, and the doings of the next twenty-four hours will settle the destiny of mankind for generations to come. The hour of the Revolution has struck at last——"

"And therefore it is time that the Angel of the Revolution should give the last signal with her own hand!" said Arnold, seized with a sudden fancy. "Come, you shall start the dynamo yourself."

(To be continued.)

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Men who are weak and suffering from nervous exhaustion, loss of vigour, Varicocele, &c., can be successfully and permanently cured without operation or detention from business by THE Dr. COLLINS most improved and rational method medical science has ever yet produced.

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The Brain Gymnasium.

ON this page, under the title, "The Brain Gymnasium," appear each week a series of puzzles calculated to occupy the attention of the competitors, with interest and profit to themselves, during the long winter evenings. Many of the tasks set will be comparatively easy of solution, while others will be designed with a view to taxing the abilities of the most proficient in this direction.

In these competitions a prize of £2 will be awarded each week to the sender of the greatest number of correct solutions, and to the senders of the ten next highest number of c rrect ones will be presented either one of our silver pencil cases or a copy of a popular six-shilling novel.

Solutions must reach the Editor, SHORT STORIES, 18 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C., by Monday, February 5th, 1900. Mark the envelope "Brain Gymnasium," and put the number of the competition of which the solution is sent at the top of the solution.

No. 21.

MY initials will form the name of a well-known Russian: "A planet," "a snare," "an animal," "a title," "a river," "a species of deer," "a reptile," and "a toy."

No. 22.

MY first two and my last two letters are the same. From my central letters words signifying "an animal," "a game," "origin," and "a grain," can be formed. My whole is bound to be taken before it can be given away.

No. 23.

R

C O N Q R O I S G L A N

A T O U E T H E N E N D

F O O F E I H S R V E R

R O U D A L A V E O N D

P E H T T L L E N R D I

COMMENCING at one of the outline letters, and proceeding in any direction except diagonally, trace out a well-known Shakesperian quotation.

No. 24.

S H F U R A R T I O I T C Y C

E O H I R E T N A K T C O H

RE-ARRANGE the above pairs of letters so that the two rows, read horizontally, will make a well-known proverb.

No. 25.

FORM one word by joining together a preposition, a pronoun, a personal pronoun, a preposition, a personal pronoun, and a preposition.

No. 26.

SORRY—RESENTED—LEND—LUNAR.

FORM the names of three well-known British artists with the letters of the four words given above.

No. 27.

BELOW are given the vowels, in the order used, of a well-known quotation from *Hamlet*. Insert the missing consonants.

I A O E A O I E O E E U E A I U O O

A E I E A O U A O E E A E O A Y A.

SOLUTIONS OF COMPETITIONS

Appearing in No. 575, Jan. 6th, 1900.

No. 7. **Begin counting at No. 18.**

No. 8. **Re-act.**

No. 9.

T
E
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T

No. 10.

EVERYDO
GHASHIS
DAYANDE
VERYMAN
HISHOUR

No. 11. **Each boy had five marbles.**

Printed and Published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON, LTD., at Pearson's Weekly Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

"IT IS A BADGE OF COURAGE."

Mr. Millward says he got low-spirited. I don't wonder. If anything on the face of the earth will "take it out of" a man, that kind of experience may be depended on to do it.

It isn't that he was confined to his house for eleven weeks. That was dull enough, but no man with pluck and mental resources need let the mere monotony of it weigh heavily on his nerves. Not in this age and country anyway, with the comforts of home around him and the portable helps of civilisation to draw upon.

"There is no man," says an eminent medical authority, "to whom the grave seems so near and death so terrible as to the male adolescent dyspeptic. He runs the gamut of fancied disease, often selecting the most serious and the least likely. Every time his pulse flutters he is sure he has heart disease, and he thinks of an attack of vertigo as a warning of approaching insanity. Fears and anxieties gather about him like clouds over the setting sun, and his courage oozes out like that of an imaginative child who is obliged to pass a churchyard after dark. In short, the depressing influence of dyspepsia upon the mind is far in excess of the actual danger to strength or to life involved in the complaint itself."

All of which is true, and explains in good part our correspondent's low state of feeling. But (as all doctors know) the ailment called dyspepsia is dangerous as well as depressing. It does more than threaten and scold—*it hits hard enough to kill.* For dyspepsia, as its name implies, is a disease of the food system, and *that*, practically, includes every organ and function of the body. Therefore, almost any disease which carries men off may have been born in a languid stomach and reared to a vicious maturity amid the sloughs and poisons of chronic dyspepsia.

As for Mr. Millward, his was a common experience; there are so many millions exactly like it between Berwick and Dover.

"It was in the spring of 1893," he says, "that my health began to give way. My strength and energy appeared to lapse from me without any reason, so far as I could see. I had more or less pain and weight at the chest, especially after eating; and I ate little enough, as I had no appetite worth calling by that name. There was a vile taste in my mouth, and I was constantly spitting up phlegm and bitter stuff that came into my throat from my stomach. I noticed, too, that what I did eat did me no good—it did not strengthen me at all. In spite of all we could do, and the medicines I took, I got weaker and weaker, until I was compelled to give up my work, and, as you may put it, make a business of being ill.

"You can better understand how bad I was when I tell you that I was confined to the house for eleven weeks, continually taking medicines of one sort and another, and hoping some of them would help me out. It was a most miserable time, and I trust it will never happen to me again.

"While I was thus a prisoner at home, taking no pleasure or comfort in anything, my wife heard of Mother Seigel's Syrup, and insisted on my trying it. More to please her than because I had any confidence in it, I got a bottle from Mr. Johnson's, at Leek, and after taking it I was better—decidedly better—and easier. I went on using the Syrup, as you might suppose, and in a few weeks I was a well man—something I never expected to be. My natural strength came back, and I was out of the house and at work once more, to my own surprise and that of all who knew me. I shall require no urging to recommend Mother Seigel's Syrup every time I meet with anybody suffering from dyspepsia. It is a badge of courage. With my health I recovered my spirits and energy, and now enjoy my meals, my work, and good company."—Matthew Millward, Grindon, near Leek, Staffs.

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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